

GW

Arts & Sciences



2024

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**Arts &
Sciences**

GW Arts & Sciences is published annually by the George Washington University Columbian College of Arts & Sciences.

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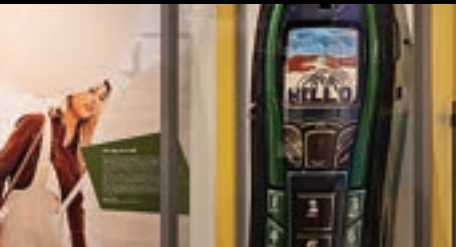


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How Snakes Scaled Evolutionary Heights



A cat-eyed snake in the Peruvian Amazon

MORE THAN 100 MILLION YEARS ago, the ancestors of the first snakes were small lizards that lived alongside other small, nondescript lizards in the shadow of the dinosaurs. Then, in a burst of innovation in form and function, snakes experienced one of the most dramatic evolutionary shifts of all time. They rapidly developed elongated legless bodies that could slither across the ground, climb into trees, burrow under the earth and crawl along the seabed. They acquired flexible skulls that enabled them to swallow large animals. Their habitats expanded. Their diets grew.

A research team that included Associate Professor of Biology

Alexander Pyron completed a decade-long project that constructed the most comprehensive evolutionary tree of snakes and lizards ever. The study presents a vivid picture of how snakes evolved faster and with more variety than other species.

“We thought maybe the [snakes] would show something exceptional in one area but maybe not in another,” Pyron noted. “But, no, it’s every single thing—increased rates of body form evolution, increased rates of diet evolution, increased rates of niche evolution. Snakes stand out as a huge cut above every other group of lizards.”

SWAN BRINGS GLOBAL LINKS TO AFRICANA STUDIES

QUITO J. SWAN, A HISTORIAN OF the African Diaspora and scholar of Black internationalism, was named the new director of the Columbian College’s Africana Studies Program this past year. Swan, who is also a professor of history and Africana studies, is the author of three award-winning books that examine global Black social movements and draw on ideas and influences from his childhood in Bermuda that continue to shape his scholarship.

In many of his works, Swan stretches the traditional boundaries of African studies beyond the Atlantic slave trade to include perspectives from Oceania and the Pacific. His forthcoming book looks at how the dancehall music of his youth fostered Black politics and anti-colonialism movements.

As director of the Africana Studies Program, Swan hopes to harness the passion of students and the support of faculty from a range of disciplines during what he called “an important and necessary time” for Africana studies. From book bans to attacks on ethnic studies in schools to “traumatic episodes of violence against Black and brown bodies,” Swan said the field is beset by crises—but also open to opportunities. “Now is a perfect time for GW to stake its claim in this important field of study,” he said.

A DOG'S EXPRESSION HELPS COMMUNICATION

RESEARCHERS FROM THE GW Primate Genomics Lab found that dogs with plainer faces—for example, dogs with faces of a solid color or without any facial markings at all—appear to make more facial movements when interacting with their human companions than dogs with patterned or multi-colored facial markings.

A study led by CCAS post-doc researcher **Courtney Sexton** also found that people are good at assessing their dogs' expressions overall, but particularly so when interacting with canine companions between the ages of 2 and 7 if the dog has a plainer face. Older dogs appear less expressive in their communications, perhaps because their relationship with their human companion has become more established. Also, service or highly trained dogs were more expressive, suggesting their human relationship demands fluent communication.

"As dogs become more and more integrated into human society, it's important that we understand how they communicate with us," Sexton explained. "If we think about this in terms of... service animals or interactions with dogs in your neighborhood, knowing what dogs are trying to tell us and what they might be thinking or feeling can really enhance both their experience and ours when we're together."



FINDING BEAUTY BEHIND BARS

AS AN ADVOCATE FOR incarcerated people, undergraduate student **Lea Nepomuceno** has heard former convicts detail their struggles both in correctional facilities and in society. Since co-founding Youth For Juvenile Justice Reform, an organization that aims to shatter stigma surrounding inmates, Nepomuceno has interviewed nearly 200 people about their prison experiences.

Now Nepomuceno is doing her part to restore a degree of dignity to people in prison. She's embarked on a project called Beauty Beyond Bars to confront the hygiene crisis in correctional



Lea Nepomuceno

facilities. With the help of other students, prison reform experts and an advisory board of educators, psychologists and formerly incarcerated people themselves, she's delivering essential products to detention centers, jails and prisons—all while advocating for better conditions and reframing the way we look at the needs of incarcerated people.

"People think beauty is about vanity," said Nepomuceno, who plans to major in criminal justice and journalism. "For these people, it's about survival."

BAD ACTOR AI ACTIVITY IN AN ELECTION YEAR

DOZENS OF COUNTRIES ARE SET to hold national elections in 2024 and analysts are sounding the alarm on the threat of bad actors using artificial intelligence to disseminate and amplify disinformation during the election season.

In the first quantitative scientific analysis on how bad actors may misuse AI globally, Professor of Physics **Neil Johnson**, and GW physics researchers **Lucia Illari** and **Richard Sear** predict that daily, bad-actor AI activity will continue to escalate this year, increasing the threat that it could affect election results. The study answers the what, where and when AI will be used by bad actors around the world, and how it can be controlled.

Among its findings: Bad actors need only basic Generative Pre-trained Transformer AI systems to manipulate information on platforms; the existing road network across 23 social media platforms will allow bad actor communities direct links to billions of users worldwide without users' knowledge; and social media companies should deploy tactics to contain the disinformation, as opposed to removing every piece of content.

"Everybody is talking about the dangers of AI, but until our study there was no science of this threat," said Johnson. "You cannot win a battle without a deep understanding of the battlefield."

Student Research Shines at CCAS Showcase



Columbian College Dean Paul Wahlbeck (left) spoke with interior architecture majors Kyle Layman and Ella Kuehnert about their study of *Lady and the Tramp*.

AN ARRAY OF GRADUATE AND undergraduate student research was once again on display at the annual CCAS Research Showcase. About 160 students presented posters from research projects across 25 CCAS disciplines—covering a gamut of topics from the impact of online discrimination on Latino youth to climate change consequences in the Black Sea to the use of light and color in Disney’s *Lady and the Tramp*.

More than 300 visitors were in attendance, including Columbian College Dean **Paul Wahlbeck**, faculty research mentors and fellow classmates.

“The students participating in this research showcase are poised to join the ranks of the next generation of scientists and scholars, armed with fresh perspectives and innovative ideas to confront the challenges of our time,” Wahlbeck said. “Fortified by an education grounded in analysis, creativity and

effective communication, they are the architects of our future.”

For students, the showcase represented the culmination of months—even years—of data collection and analysis. Junior neuroscience major **Anisah Daniel**, for example, built on her internship at the National Institutes of Health for a project measuring the health effects of adults switching from highly processed Western diets to Mediterranean-like dishes.

Many students noted that, in addition to presenting their own research, the highlight of the event was comparing notes with classmates from different disciplines.

Daniel said the passion of her fellow presenters has inspired her own work. “Seeing all these posters in all these different disciplines and how they all intersect has really motivated me,” she said. “And it’s shown the greater impact of what we do here at GW.”

WITH AI, DOES RACE MATTER?

AS MORE INTERACTIONS BECOME partially or wholly digital, and as artificial intelligence becomes a more central part of those digital interactions, how might prejudices and stereotypes translate into the digital environment?

Research co-authored by Assistant Professor of Organizational Sciences **Nils Olsen** found that when consumers interacted with three identical chatbots with different racialized cartoon avatars—one white, one Asian and one Black—they rated the Black avatar highest on scales of competence, warmth and “humanness.” Consumers who interacted with the Black bot also reported higher satisfaction levels.

“We had predicted the opposite, because our predictions were based on humans,” said study co-author and GW Professor of Marketing **Vanessa Perry**. Part of that mismatch might be due to an effect known as “expectancy violation,” which happens when a cue or signal is not consistent with expectations and causes stereotypes to flip.

The researchers plan to expand their study of demographic factors—including gender and educational background—that could play into AI perception. The field is of interest as more companies incorporate AI into consumer-facing roles.

I DON'T: OFFERING SUPPORT AFTER A BROKEN ENGAGEMENT

HOW DO YOU SUPPORT A FRIEND when a wedding engagement is called off? New research led by Communications Professor **Wendy Riemann** revealed that a few kind words can go a long way.

Her study on the most effective ways of supporting someone who is going through a difficult time, such as a broken marriage engagement, identified the messages that ranged from being most supportive to those lacking empathy. Listening, spending time with someone and providing tangible assistance were deemed most helpful; offering apologies or criticizing the ex-partner was viewed as sometimes helpful; and expressing platitudes or passing judgment was the least helpful.

“This research is applicable to many situations beyond broken engagements because so many people are in need of support from others,” Riemann noted. “If someone is going through a miscarriage, cancer treatment or grieving a loss, for example, the exact wording of a message may vary, but the idea of being fully present for that person and putting some thought into a kind response can make a positive difference in improving that person’s well-being.”



Turtle ant workers moving between nests



SHAPING BIODIVERSITY AT SMALL SCALES

HOW DO MANY DIFFERENT species manage to coexist in one place? A research team led by **Max Adams**, a former post-doc in the Biology Department, and including Associate Professor of Biology **Scott Powell**, has drawn a new robust biodiversity picture—thanks to a kingdom of ants in Florida’s Dagny Forest.

The study focused on trees where the ants make nests in pockets of dead wood and found that the same dynamics of resource availability and competition

that exist at large scales—on a continent or within a large forest, for example—also exist at the very small scales of these ant communities. When observing these interactions in three different scales, the researchers discovered that resource availability and competition often flip-flopped in importance. The authors said their findings underscore the vital role of biodiversity and reinforce the model of a healthy forest, noting that the dead wood within a habitat is critical for every species within that community.

National Gallery Partners on Arts and Education



Steve Mann (right), head of exhibitions at the National Gallery of Art, leads a student workshop on exhibition planning and project management.

THE CORCORAN GALLERY OF Art trustees and the National Gallery of Art launched a new initiative to facilitate immersive learning, art-making and interdisciplinary research that will drive exhibitions, performances and curriculum at Columbia College's Corcoran School of the Arts & Design.

The National Gallery is now teaching workshops at the Corcoran on topics ranging from curatorial strategies to exhibition writing, design and planning. Other plans include inviting students to present at special evening events. And a newly established Corcoran Legacy

Gallery will be located on the main floor of the National Gallery's West Building. There, iconic works from the former Corcoran Gallery collection will rotate.

"We are creating a space for the study of arts and design that will open up the future for us," said Corcoran Director **Lauren Onkey**. "Not only are we planning unique, behind-the-scenes experiences at the National Gallery for our students, we will be attracting visiting artists, scholars and performers, and enriching the community with exhibitions and educational opportunities."

CCAS ALUMNI TOP FORBES' LIST

COLUMBIAN COLLEGE ALUMNI **Atticus Francken**, BS '16, **Brandon Kumar**, BA '16, and **Eric Darnell**, BA '16, were among those cited in this year's *Forbes*' "30 Under 30" list of young professionals who are making their mark in the world.

Francken serves as president and cofounder of Econergy, a renewable energy company established in 2018 with the mission of addressing the climate crisis. As the leading non-utility provider of energy for schools nationwide, Econergy achieved a significant milestone by successfully implementing the first commercial application of a bi-directional electric battery to power electric school buses. In addition to his work at Econergy, Francken has played a pivotal role in founding educational enterprises like MajorClarity, Snickerdoodle Labs and Guardian Labs.

Kumar is a cofounder of Layer3, an educational platform designed to guide individuals in the use and investment of cryptocurrency. Layer3 has attracted 250,000 monthly active users and has notable customers, including Coinbase and Uniswap. The project successfully secured \$6.5 million in seed funding from investors. Prior to establishing Layer3, Kumar served as an associate at Accolade Partners, a venture capital firm.

Darnell is a talent agent at WME, where he works with notable clients such as actor Denzel Washington, director A.V. Rockwell and writer Janine Nabers. As the first Black agent in his department, Darnell is committed to assisting his clients, particularly those in the Black community, break barriers. Prior to joining WME, Darnell worked at Sony Pictures and LucasFilms, where he supported the production of *Star Wars Ep 9: The Rise of Skywalker*.

Sandy Kawano



KAWANO NABS PRESTIGIOUS CAREER AWARD

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF Biology **Sandy Kawano** received a 2024 CAREER Award, the National Science Foundation's most prestigious award supporting early-career faculty who serve as academic role models in research and education and lead advances in their field.

"Receiving this grant is a real game changer in my pursuits as a teacher-scholar to not only advance the science but also the scientists," Kawano said.

Kawano supervises the CCAS Fins and Limbs Lab, which studies the anatomical and physiological features that enable vertebrate animals to move effectively in different environments that range from fully aquatic to fully terrestrial. Her CAREER award will support research on the evolutionary biomechanics of salamander locomotion, integrating physiology, engineering and evolutionary biology to examine how habitat preference and development affect the structure and function of bones and whole-organism performance.

THIS YEAR'S TOP RESEARCH GRANTS

DURING THE 2023-24 ACADEMIC year, CCAS scholars and scientists from across the disciplines received significant funding support for research ranging from an analysis of early childhood development to studying the link between alcohol use and chronic pain. Here's a sampling of the top grant awards:

Sandy Kawano (Biology) was awarded \$1,820,660 from the W. M. Keck Foundation to examine the comparative biomechanics of fins and limbs.

Sherry Molock (Psychology) received a \$1,495,039 grant from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention to support her work with HAVEN, a multi-generational suicide prevention program in African American churches.

Neil Johnson (Physics) was awarded \$818,049 from the National Science Foundation (NSF) for his research on trustworthy AI agents.

Marya Rozanova-Smith (Geography) received a \$717,355 NSF grant to examine how changes in climate and water cycles impact people living in cold regions.

Jody Ganiban (Psychology) was awarded \$705,341 from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for research on an early growth and development study she is conducting as part of the ECHO (Environmental influences on Child Health Outcomes) program.

Stephen Mitroff (Psychology) received grants totaling \$656,409 from the U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command for his project PARADIGMS

(Platform for Accelerating Research and Development that is Integrative and Generative over Massive Scales), and to study state and trait influences on variability in human performance.

Scott Powell (Biology) was awarded \$645,000 from NSF to address fundamental questions about how competition shapes both the production and maintenance of biodiversity.

Ellen Yeung (Psychology) received a \$424,194 award from NIH to study alcohol use disorder and chronic pain.

Daniele Podini (Forensic Sciences) was awarded a \$413,504 grant from the National Institute of Justice for research on hair shaft DNA.

Ling Hao (Chemistry) received a \$363,130 NIH grant to examine the metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease.

Michael Doering (Physics) was awarded a \$360,000 NSF grant to use numerical techniques known as lattice QCD (quantum chromodynamics) to study the interaction of particle physics.

Evangeline Downie (Physics) received a \$356,158 NSF grant to create the first simultaneous measurement of muon and electron scattering on the proton for MUSE (Muon Proton Scattering Experiment).

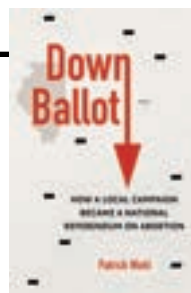
George Younes (Physics) was awarded grants totaling \$304,536 from the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center for magnetar monitoring projects.

bookcase



DOWN BALLOT: HOW A LOCAL CAMPAIGN BECAME A NATIONAL REFERENDUM ON ABORTION

In 1990, a suburban Chicago race for the Republican Party nomination for state representative unexpectedly became a national proxy battle over abortion in the United States. But the hard-fought primary also illustrated the overlooked importance of down-ballot contests in America's culture wars. **Patrick Wohl**, BA '16, tells a dramatic story of a rollercoaster campaign that, after attracting political celebrities and a media circus, came down to 31 votes, a coin toss and a recount fight that set a precedent for how to count dimpled chads. Wohl, a former staffer on races for president, governor and state officials, provides an insider's look at the nuts-and-bolts of electioneering.



A Sampling of Books by Alumni



ACCOUNTABILITY IN STATE LEGISLATURES

In *Accountability in State Legislatures*, **Steven Rogers**, BA '07, MA '08, makes the provocative claim that even though state legislatures have tremendous authority over key facets of our lives—from health care to marriage to immigration policy—elections do little to hold state legislators accountable. Indeed, Rogers reveals that almost 90 percent of voters do not know who their state legislator is and over a third of incumbent legislators regularly do not face a challenger in either the primary or general election. Examining wide-ranging quantitative and qualitative evidence, he concludes that instead of serving as a referendum on state legislators' own actions, state legislative elections are dominated by national politics, posing profound problems for democratic accountability.

THE COURT V. THE VOTERS: THE TROUBLING STORY OF HOW THE SUPREME COURT HAS UNDERMINED VOTING RIGHTS

While the black-robed justices of the U.S. Supreme Court may seem far removed from our lives, **Joshua Douglas**, BA '02, JD '07, displays how their rulings have tangible, real-world effects—particularly on voting rights. By looking behind the scenes of nine landmark voting rights decisions—some surprising and unknown, some familiar—he investigates the historic crossroads that have irrevocably changed our elections and the nation. From *Bush v. Gore* to *Citizens United*, Douglas tells the story of each case and how it led to the erosion of meaningful protections for the right to vote. He sheds light on the intractable election problems we face as a result and highlights the unique role the highest court has played in producing a broken electoral system.



ON THE FRINGE: CONFESSIONS OF A MAVERICK ANTHROPOLOGIST

A pioneering medical anthropologist, a former member of the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS and a GW research professor, **Edward C. Green**, BA '67, has advocated for public health around the world and worked on every inhabited continent. But as he reveals in his reflective memoir *On the Fringe*, he has also been plagued since childhood with insecurity and depression despite a privileged upbringing. Green's book guides the readers through his personal and professional adventures—from living with the descendants of a runaway slave society in the Amazon to meeting "spirit mediums" in Nigeria. Along the journey, he offers an on-the-ground assessment at how we aid developing nations.

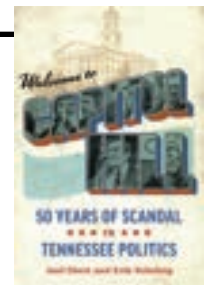


VOICES FOR TRANSGENDER EQUALITY

Transgender rights have become a flashpoint in the American culture wars with transgender people facing unrelenting hostility from politicians and pundits. In this landscape, transgender activists crafted new communication strategies to fight for equality, stall attempts to undermine their rights and win the support of large swathes of the public. **Thomas Billard**, BA '14, offers an insider's view into transgender activism during the Trump administration. With his extensive observations as founder of the National Center for Transgender Equality, he shows how activists developed an unlikely blend of online and offline strategies to introduce supporting views into national, local and community media outlets as well as public and private conversations.

WELCOME TO CAPITOL HILL: 50 YEARS OF SCANDAL IN TENNESSEE POLITICS

Tennessee has a rich history of political scandals dating back to the founding of the state—with one pundit calling political corruption as endemic to the Volunteer State as the Grand Ole Opry. And the last 50 years may have topped them all. A veteran political reporter and editor of *The Tennessee Journal*, **Erik Schelzig**, MA '99, co-authored this guide to Tennessee's most confusing, confounding and occasionally ludicrous ethical breaches—from pay-for-pardons and gambling schemes to undercover bribery stings and sexual misconduct investigations. The authors draw from interviews, archival documents and never-before-seen federal investigative files to provide readers with a handy resource about the wrongdoings of elected officials.



A Sampling of Books by Faculty



DISRUPTING D.C.: THE RISE OF UBER AND THE FALL OF THE CITY

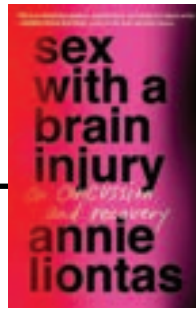
Washington, D.C., was the first city to fight back against Uber. It was also the first city where the resistance was defeated. In D.C., the company created a playbook for how to deal with intransigent regulators and win in the realm of local politics. As co-author and Assistant Professor of Geography **Declan Cullen** explains, the nation's capital serves as a blueprint for how Uber conquered cities around the world. Drawing on interviews with gig workers, policymakers, Uber lobbyists and community organizers, *Disrupting D.C.* presents a 360-degree view of an urban America in crisis and the collapse of city policy infrastructure as we know it.



AFTER 1177 B.C.: THE SURVIVAL OF CIVILIZATIONS

Professor of Classics and Anthropology **Eric H. Cline** picks up where his bestseller *1177 B.C.: The Year Civilization Collapsed* left off and follows the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean world over four centuries after the fall of Late Bronze Age civilizations. Exploring why some societies survive massive shocks while others disappear, he charts the rise of civilizations like the Phoenicians, Philistines and Israelites through the first Olympic Games in 776 B.C. and the emergence of iron use and the alphabet. Cline also teamed with illustrator Glynnis Fawkes on *1177 B.C.: A Graphic History of the Year Civilization Collapsed*, a comic adaptation that takes young readers on an ancient history adventure.



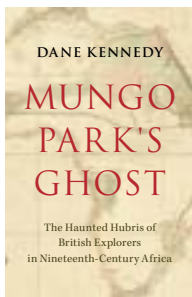


SEX WITH A BRAIN INJURY

Assistant Professor of English **Annie Liontas** suffered multiple concussions in her thirties. In *Sex with a Brain Injury*, she writes about what it means to be one of the “walking wounded,” tracing her fear, her rage, her physical suffering and the effects of head trauma on her marriage and relationships. Liontas weaves history, philosophy and personal accounts to interrogate and expand representations of mental health, ability and disability—particularly in relation to women and the LGBT community. She also uncovers the surprising legacy of brain injury, examining its role in culture, the criminal justice system and through historical figures like Henry VIII and Harriet Tubman.

MUNGO PARK'S GHOST

In 1816, the British sent two ambitious expeditions to Africa: one to follow the Niger River to its outlet, the other to trace the Congo River to its source. They were completing the mission of Scottish explorer Mungo Park, who had disappeared on a similar journey. Both voyages ended disastrously—but have largely been forgotten today. In *Mungo Park's Ghost*, Professor Emeritus of History and International Affairs **Dane Kennedy** revives the centuries-old mystery. He delves deep into an African interior torn apart by the brutality of the slave trade and provides fresh insights on imperialism and colonial history.

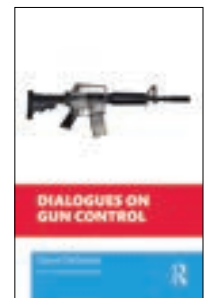


WRITING BLACKGIRLS' AND WOMEN'S HEALTH SCIENCE

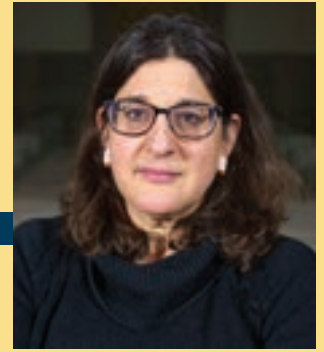
Jameta Nicole Barlow, assistant professor of writing and women's, gender, and sexuality studies, edited and contributed to this scholarly collection that presents a new lens into the field of Black girls' and women's health science. Along with fellow practitioners, theorists, visionaries and innovators, Barlow helps deepen our understanding of Black women's health studies from both a transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary perspective. She and the contributing authors draw upon their ontological and epistemological knowledge to formulate pathways and inform methodologies for doing research and praxis in the field. They showcase Black women's narratives of lived experiences to provide a roadmap to wellness and full vitality.

DIALOGUES ON GUN CONTROL

What happens when two intelligent American college students with different attitudes about guns launch into a careful exploration of the ethics of gun policy? What if a European exchange student's voice is add to the mix? That's the scenario Elton Professor of Philosophy **David DeGrazia** creates in his imagined dialogues that consider real-world questions on one of today's most important debates. Combining empirical data and philosophical arguments, he sheds light on the reality of guns in the U.S. and offers a path for people on both sides of the issue to communicate constructively and agree on many ideas.



Never Neutral: U.S. Museums Face Historical ‘Reckoning’



Laura Schiavo

THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF Natural History made headlines in early 2024 by announcing the closure of two halls exhibiting Native American objects. Other museums followed suit. It was all in response to a new federal policy requiring museums to obtain consent from tribes before exhibiting cultural items.

But the moves were more than just regulatory compliance, according to **Laura Schiavo**, associate professor of museum studies. She called it a “reckoning”—a response to a history of grave robbing, archaeological excavation and centuries of theft from Native people.

And while it may have been long overdue, Schiavo said it wasn’t surprising. In fact, Schiavo, who has worked for D.C.-area museums including the City Museum and the National Building Museum, pointed to an open secret in the museum world: These trusted cultural institutions have always been deeply embedded in the politics of their time.

“No museum is neutral,” said Schiavo, editor of the book *U.S.*

Museum Histories and the Politics of Interpretation. “As professionals, if we don’t understand [the exhibit closings] to be part of a long line of engaging with the cultural politics of museums, then we don’t understand this

moment at all. If we want people to keep coming to museums, we need to deal with the past.”

Emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic, the museum world has grappled with issues like an evolving

relationship to technology and a deeper focus on ethics and values in collecting.

Schiavo’s book, a collection drawing on the scholarship of historians, art historians and anthropologists from across the country who study museums, traces U.S. museums’ past to inform their future. From the nation-building narratives of the early 19th century to modern representations of inclusion and pressing issues like climate change, Schiavo said U.S. museums are both influenced by and help inform the events swirling around them. At times, she argued, they have either reinforced popular notions of race, gender and progress—or challenged them.

“These are institutions of power that tell stories about identity,” she said. “Which objects [museums] choose to exhibit—and how they put these exhibits together—usually comes out of an ideology.”

Meanwhile, they’ve largely maintained a reputation among the public and policymakers as unbiased sources of information. By contrast, Schiavo said, museums have historically collected and displayed objects to fit narratives rooted in ideologies of race, class and gender. For example, in the 1920s the Witte Museum in San Antonio exhibited weapons and items like land deeds and maps that celebrated Texas settlers and silenced Tejano voices, showcasing a Texas narrative history that validated Anglo supremacy and violence.

Fraught Connection

The fraught connection between U.S. museums and Native Americans dates back centuries, Schiavo said,

noting that “the white people creating this country had a fascination with the uniqueness of Native Americans” to contrast their new nation from Europe.

That’s what happened in the early 19th century when famed explorer William Clark, then the federal superintendent of Indian affairs, used his Indian Museum in St. Louis to advance his diplomatic interests. He promoted U.S. power by displaying aspects of Indigenous culture to white American audiences in an argument for removal and assimilation—items from Native American life like buffalo robes, wampum and blankets.

Today, exhibiting Native American human remains is prohibited. In 1990, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act established protocols for returning human remains and other items to tribes. Yet museums still hold tens of thousands of human remains in storage. The most recent federal regulations were designed to hasten returns and ensure consultation with tribes—leading to a reexamination of museum displays and the American Museum of Natural History’s decision to close exhibition space.

Even as the museum landscape changes, Schiavo sees an opportunity to right historical wrongs while shifting the very mission of museums themselves—away from the “beloved truth-teller” role, she said, and toward forums for dialogue and provocative conversations.

“There is power in these social spaces where information and ideas are exchanged,” she said. “That’s much more dynamic than an institution that just claims to tell big truths.”



Our Kitchens, Ourselves

In her book *Season to Taste*, Writing Professor Caroline J. Smith serves up a tour of how kitchens have changed over the decades to reflect societal shifts and gender politics.



Caroline J. Smith

IT'S ARGUABLY THE MOST IMPORTANT room in the house—the one where meals and memories are made. From person to person and generation to generation, it can alternately feel like a claustrophobic cubby or the heart of the home.

It's the kitchen. And while many of us feel like we spend our whole lives there, Associate Professor of Writing **Caroline J. Smith** believes we can still learn a lot about how our kitchens reflect our society—and ourselves.

In her book *Season to Taste: Rewriting Kitchen Space in Contemporary Women's Food Memoirs*, Smith takes readers on a tour of the ever-shifting kitchen space. Examining food writing through memoirs, recipes and even *Better Homes and Gardens* articles, she

traces the evolution of kitchens since the 1960s—not just from linoleum floors to stainless steel countertops, but also through the lens of feminist writers and liberation movements. Along the way, she documents how the kitchen has been reframed from a gender prison to a stage for self-discovery. She examines how kitchens have reflected gender roles and societal shifts over the course of decades.

"In the '60s, the kitchen was seen as a place for women to escape from," said Smith, whose previous work has dissected pop culture staples including "chick lit" and the TV series *Mad Men*. "I was asking how, in the 21st century, women redefined their relationship with this space."

Q: Your book looks at how changing views of kitchens mirrored women's changing roles from the '60s to today. What did feminist writers traditionally think of the kitchen?

A: In second-wave feminist writing, the word that often comes up is "imprisonment." The kitchen is holding you in, locking you away. Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, for example, looked at the "happy housewife heroine" syndrome—these bright, educated, middle-class women who were confined to the home. Friedan was trying to mobilize women to get out of the kitchen and enter into a more active public sphere.

Q: When does the shift back to the kitchen begin?

A: There were isolated individuals even in the '60s like Julia Child. But it's really in the first decade of the 21st century that we see a rise in food culture and food writing, particularly by women. As women in society obtained access to public spaces, we started to see this move back to the kitchen. In the book, I look at the different ways women are now using the kitchen to self-actualize and work through their own identities as they reclaim this space. The blogger Shauna James Ahern talks about it as "winking while we bake"—this sense that women are recoding the space of the kitchen to fit contemporary times.

Q: You've shared how our views of the kitchen have evolved. Talk about

how the actual physical space has changed too.

A: I looked at decades of *Better Homes and Gardens* to see how they were presenting the kitchen. And we really do see the change in the kitchen space reflecting the change in women's roles. The '60s posited the kitchen as this place that's often contained—shutting women off to the side in a tiny space that's cut off from the rest of the home. In more contemporary culture, as women moved into the public sphere or workplace, we've opened up the kitchen and made it part of the larger home. The walls between the kitchen and the home living space literally disappeared.

Q: What other big shifts have you seen?

A: The kitchen space was almost exclusively one for women—and mostly white women. But today, men are often portrayed cooking. And there's less of a whiteness in the space. The most prevalent images of women of color in the kitchen had often been as enslaved or domestic workers. Now we have a more inclusive representation. On her blog, cookbook author Jocelyn Delk Adams flips Friedan's "happy housewife heroine" on its head by performing the role of the stereotypical housewife as a Black woman. We're also looking at the kitchen in a less hierarchical way. You don't have to be a chef to be confident in the kitchen. There doesn't have to be a separation between professional and private home cooking.





NEW YORK CITY.—IRISH DEPOSITORS OF THE EMIGRANT SAVINGS BANK WITHDRAWING MONEY TO SEND TO THEIR SUFFERING RELATIVES IN THE O

In an illustration from Anbinder's book, customers of the Emigrant Savings Bank send money to their families in 1880. (Illustrations courtesy Tyler Anbinder)



LD COUNTRY.—SEE PAGE 27.

History Detectives: Following the Lives of Potato Famine Immigrants

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For a decade, History’s Tyler Anbinder and his student researchers dug through 100 years of long-lost bank records from Irish immigrants. What they found rewrote a historical tale.

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THERE WERE THOUSANDS OF NAMES—SCORES OF Kellys, Murphys and Sullivans. They were scribbled on bank slips, stamped on ship manifests and printed on marriage records.

Each stood for one of the 1.3 million Irish immigrants who fled to the United States when the potato famine of the 1840s and ’50s hit their homeland. Emeritus Professor of History **Tyler Anbinder** called it “one of the biggest refugee exoduses ever.”

Like history detectives, Anbinder and a small army of student research assistants spent more than 10 years following 15,000 immigrant names through troves of official records—through bank account balances, census data and birth and death certificates.

And in his book *Plentiful Country: The Great Potato Famine and the Making of Irish New York* (Little, Brown and Company, 2024), Anbinder frames that decade of meticulous research into a new immigrant story, one that traces their journey from the fields of Ireland to the streets of New York City while telling a wider tale that dispels long-standing myths.

Historians lacked the resources to tell that full story—until now. Building on richly detailed records from the vaults of the Emigrant Savings Bank of New York—a gold mine of historical documents that were inaccessible to the public for 150 years—Anbinder and his team of more than 30 student researchers uncovered extensive biographical information for individual Irish immigrants. He traced the ships that brought them to America, their often-rising household incomes and their job paths from ragpickers to saloonkeepers. While they often began their American lives facing poverty and discrimination, the team found that many prospered over time.

“The famine immigrants were the first to cement the idea of the American Dream as we understand it today,” Anbinder said. “They climbed the socioeconomic ladder relatively swiftly. From that point on, Americans couldn’t say only certain people can succeed.”

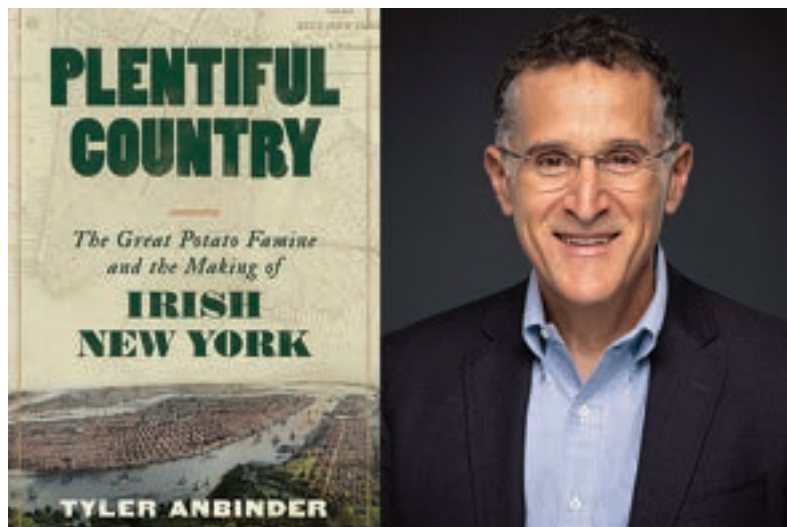
Piecing those bank ledgers into generations of life stories was a decade-long process. It involved deciphering handwritten records, chasing ancestry leads and managing massive databases with thousands of immigrant names. The research team often hit dead ends—like names that suddenly disappeared from historical records. Others left behind a trail of growing families and economic success that reframed the picture of Irish immigrants in America.

“This is what I love about being a historian—finding these data points and figuring out what these lives might have been like,” said **Hope McCaffrey**, BA ’13, a PhD candidate in history at Northwestern University who worked on the project for 10 years, beginning as a first-year student assistant.

Historic Lives

Looking at history through the lens of individual lives has long been a hallmark of Anbinder’s books, including his award-winning *City of Dreams: The 400-Year Epic History of Immigrant New York* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016), which was named a *New York Times* Notable Book of 2016.

More than 20 years ago, while researching a book on the Five Points neighborhood in Lower Manhattan, Anbinder first came across the bank records which had only recently been made available at the New York Public Library. Despite their detail, the skeletal biographies weren’t enough to sustain a compelling



*Emeritus Professor of History Tyler Anbinder is the author of *Plentiful Country: The Great Potato Famine and the Making of Irish New York*.*

narrative. But his research dovetailed with another historical sea change: the digital revolution. Suddenly genealogy records were easily accessible online through sites like Ancestry.com.

“Those two things—the genealogical records online combined with the Emigrant Savings Bank records—let us trace the lives of the famine immigrants in a way that no one had ever thought possible,” he said.

The task was still daunting. With a nearly \$300,000 National Endowment for the Humanities grant, Anbinder hired researchers across CCAS—from English majors who transcribed handwritten notes to economics majors who tallied bank account balances. Still, of the 15,000 New Yorkers in the bank records, the team found book-worthy material for just one in 20. “It could be frustrating [for students] to finish a day of work and not trace a single immigrant,” he said. “They didn’t realize how laborious it can be to strike gold.”

Rise and Fall

McCaffrey joined Anbinder’s team after taking his American Civil War class. As a research assistant, she discovered a hidden talent for deciphering old handwriting. “That’s how my grandma wrote. And my mom, who’s a doctor, has scribbly handwriting,” she said. “It turned out I had this niche skill that was valuable.”

A history major, McCaffrey painstakingly transcribed biographical information from the bank ledgers to giant Excel documents—thousands of rows of names, occupations and account numbers. During intense hours of computer research—“There’s no comfortable position when you’re sitting for 10 hours straight,” she laughed—McCaffrey became deeply



THE DEPARTURE.

An 1850 illustration depicts Irish immigrants sailing to the U.S. on an overcrowded ship during the potato famine.

“The famine immigrants were the first to cement the idea of the American Dream as we understand it today.”

— TYLER ANBINDER,
EMERITUS PROFESSOR
OF HISTORY

invested, obsessively tracking information like the names of tiny Irish villages. “Nothing matches the attention to detail [Anbinder] puts into his work,” she said. “I felt very lucky to be part of this process.”

Lindsay M. Chervinsky, BA '10, now a senior fellow with the Center for Presidential History at Southern Methodist University, attended the same Anbinder class as McCaffrey—“To this day, the hardest class I’ve ever taken,” she said—during her senior year at GW. As a researcher for Anbinder, she scoured census data and online ancestry sites. Often, she tracked families’ fortunes rising. But sometimes the data told a different story, like children’s names vanishing from records after epidemics. “I started seeing them as people, not data points,” Chervinsky said. “I’d cheer them on when they did well. And it would be heartbreaking when they suffered loss.”

For Anbinder, *Plentiful Country* adds a new chapter to immigration history. An impressive 40 percent of the names his team tracked eventually rose from unskilled positions like day laborers and domestic workers to become clerks, civil servants and business owners including saloonkeepers, the pinnacle of Irish immigrant success at the time. “Like immigrants today, those Irish immigrants were ambitious, driven people who wanted to work to make their way in America,” he said.



Lindsay M. Chervinsky, BA '10, (left) and Hope McCaffrey, BA '13, worked as Anbinder’s student researchers.

And for his students, their apprenticeships opened doors to their own careers. Anbinder helped McCaffrey obtain a research grant and collaborated on her first peer-reviewed publication. Chervinsky recently completed her second book, *Making the Presidency: John Adams and the Precedents That Forged the Republic*, which will be published in September by Oxford University Press.

Anbinder “taught me how to be a historian,” she said. “He encouraged me to think big and dream big.”



Born to Run— for President

How did Barack Obama and Bruce Springsteen travel a thunder road to the political promised land? Luther Rice Fellow Maureen Rafter studied the ties that bind the president and the Boss.

IT'S A PARTNERSHIP BORN IN THE USA. BARACK Obama and Bruce Springsteen. A Black man from the shores of Hawaii and a white man from the swamps of Jersey. One crashed a wrecking ball through racial barriers, the other powered a chrome-wheeled, fuel-injected rise to rock and roll stardom. A president and a boss.

And while the ties that bind the statesman and the singer have held for years—from standing side-by-side at presidential campaign rallies to collaborating on books and podcasts—**Maureen Rafter**, BA '24, said the pair represent more than just Democratic glory days.

As an American studies and music major, Rafter's Luther Rice Undergraduate Fellowship project, "Rock the Vote: Barack Obama's Sonic Identity in Rock Campaign Music," concluded that the Obama-Springsteen team is among the most unique cultural partnerships in U.S. presidential history.

Stringing together hours of CSPAN and YouTube footage along with scholarly research in disciplines like musicology, political science and communications studies, Rafter revealed how their

cultural and political duet introduced Obama to a broader voting audience and propelled Springsteen to national political prominence.

"Rock and Springsteen allowed Obama to simultaneously appeal to a different demographic while forming a sense of presidential identity based on preconceived notions of who a president was," Rafter said. In turn, Springsteen became "essentially the band leader of the Democratic Party" through his continued association with Obama.

"They are sealing their legacies together," she said.

Tramps Like Us

Rafter's Luther Rice research allowed her to revisit the soundtrack of her childhood—when Obama was making history on Pennsylvania Avenue and Springsteen was writing guitar anthems on E Street.

Growing up in Maryland, her mom, a music teacher, taught her classical chords while her dad, a baby boomer, raised her on classic rock. "I was playing Bach and Beethoven at my piano lessons—

“Rock and Springsteen allowed Obama to simultaneously appeal to a different demographic while forming a sense of presidential identity based on preconceived notions of who a president was.... They are sealing their legacies together.”

— MAUREEN RAFTER, BA '24

and then my dad would pick me up and we'd blast Bruce in the car,” she said. “That spirit is alive in my research.”

At GW, Rafter tuned into music and cultural studies—like Professor of American Studies **Gayle Wald**'s course on the World of Bob Dylan and a first-year seminar by Associate Professor of Musicology **Loren Kajikawa** on class, music and politics. Her Luther Rice project built on her research into musical genres in contemporary presidential campaigns. She initially explored whether candidates tailored their playlists to different audiences—walking on stage to country music in red states, for example. Kajikawa, her Luther Rice faculty advisor, encouraged her to narrow her focus to one candidate (Obama) and one genre (rock).

“By exploring how popular music plays a role in the construction of presidential identity, Maureen's Luther Rice Fellowship project demonstrates how perspectives from the arts and humanities can provide unique insight into electoral politics,” Kajikawa said.

Springsteen was just a back-up player in Rafter's original concept. But the more she dove into Obama's political soundscape, the more she realized the Boss was the campaign front man.

“It became clear from the start that there was a very strong—and very intentional—relationship between the Obama campaign and Bruce Springsteen,” she noted. “They were tied in ways that we really hadn't seen in the past.”



American studies and music major Maureen Rafter combined her love of songs and politics for her project on Obama and Springsteen. (Photo: Caitlin Oldham)

From Badlands to the Promised Land

Presidential candidates have long linked their campaigns to pop music theme songs—from FDR using *Happy Days Are Here Again* to signal recovery from the Great Depression to Bill Clinton playing Fleetwood Mac's *Don't Stop (Thinking about Tomorrow)* to project images of a prosperous future. Hillary Clinton featured the Katy Perry hit *Roar* in her 2016 rallies, but it was mostly designed to “set a vibe” and reflect a female empowerment message, Rafter said.

Springsteen's presence on the campaign trail, Rafter noted, gave Obama more than a theme song. A freshman senator from Illinois, Obama came into the 2008 campaign as an unknown to some demographics—including white working-class voters who might have backed his more traditionalist war-hero opponent John McCain. “For 200 years prior to 2008, the U.S. presidency was associated with white masculinity,” Rafter noted. “Springsteen provided [Obama] with proximity to that world.”

The Obama campaign gambled that Springsteen's Americana lyrics spoke to the blue-collar “tramps like us” who punched a time clock and kept faith in their vision of the American Dream—even if they were stymied by the system's “death traps” and “suicide raps.”

“They saw themselves in Springsteen's characters,” Rafter said.

For Springsteen, the partnership cemented his status as a political activist as well as a music icon. It also added a layer of racial legitimacy to his persona, much like his pairing with saxophonist Clarence Clemons swayed Black audiences to embrace his E Street Band. Both friendships “prove to people that he means what he says—that he's the real deal,” Rafter explained.

In today's political landscapes, however, Rafter said candidates increasingly turn to social media platforms like TikTok for cultural relevance. And while Taylor Swift famously baked Biden-Harris cookies in 2020, celebrities now largely attach themselves to causes instead of candidates, like singer Bad Bunny advocating for social justice or Leonardo DiCaprio promoting climate change initiatives.

Rafter, who presented her findings at the International Association for the Study of Popular Music Conference in Philadelphia, now says she has two other items on her setlist: She plans to pursue a PhD in musicology and vows to finally see a Springsteen concert with her dad. A scheduled D.C. show was canceled in 2023, but Rafter is undeterred. She's taking inspiration from one of her favorite Boss tunes: *No Surrender*.

“One way or another, we'll get to a show together,” she said.



Cellphone Central: Smithsonian Exhibit Dials



The Cellphone: Unseen Connections exhibit at the National Museum of Natural History traces the technological, environmental and cultural impacts of the cellphone. (Photos courtesy Smithsonian Institution National Museum of Natural History)

into GW Collaboration



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***With input from Columbian College scholars and students,
an exhibit at the National Museum of Natural History charts
how cellphones have changed our lives and our planet.***

IT'S THE FASTEST GROWING TECHNOLOGY IN human history, one that's reshaped industries, connected people around the world and transformed the way we express ourselves.

And nearly all of us carry it in our pockets.

It's the cellphone—a device so prevalent in society that there are more of them in circulation than there are people on the planet.

And now the “technology that everyone loves to hate and hates to love,” as Professional Lecturer in Anthropology **Joshua A. Bell** put it, is the subject of an exhibition at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, which is informed by collaborative research with George Washington University scholars and students.

Curated by Bell, who also serves as the museum's curator of globalization, *Cellphone: Unseen Connections* traces the technological, environmental and cultural impact of the cellphone—while telling the global story of how it evolved from a bulky brick-like eyesore to a sleek razor-thin fashion statement. The exhibit features interactive displays, including a cellphone repair game, and hundreds of objects such as minerals, undersea cables, phone cases decorated with Indigenous art and even a 6-foot-tall fantasy coffin crafted by a Ghanaian artist to resemble a cellphone.

“We're telling a human story about how we connect to each other, to technology and to the rest of the world—all through this object that most of us can't live without,” Bell said.

Building on long-standing partnerships between the Smithsonian and GW, the exhibition is partly influenced by more than 10 years of research efforts by GW professors and students.

Along with Bell, **Alexander Dent** and **Joel Kuipers**—both professors of anthropology and international affairs—have spearheaded cellphone scholarship with initiatives like the Cellular Connections Project, a National Science Foundation-funded project that evaluated the effects of cellular technology on Washington, D.C., teens. Collectively, their work has received more than \$500,000 in grants from the Smithsonian, GW and the Wenner Gren Foundation, and involved research that helped inform the Smithsonian exhibit. The funding fostered an ongoing collaboration between GW and the

National Museum of Natural History, Bell said.

“Technological transformations have characterized each historical period—and, for us, the cellphone is the fundamental technological intervention of our time,” Dent said.

Much of their data was processed at the GW Discourse Laboratory, which was developed by Kuipers in 1997 and serves as a base of operations for GW's cellphone-related studies. As many as 100 students—GW undergraduate, graduate and PhD students as well as D.C. area high

school students—also made critical contributions to the long-term research, from collecting cellphone data to developing teaching strategies to working directly with Bell on designing the Smithsonian exhibit.

Among them, **Nicole Merullo**, BA '18, now a clinical research coordinator at Tufts Medical Center, spent two years observing cellphone use in D.C. classrooms and interviewing teenagers and parents about their attitudes toward their cellphones. “I really learned what it was like to be an anthropologist in the field—when to be both the quiet, invisible presence, and when to become part of the group,” she said.

“We're telling a human story about how we connect to each other, to technology and to the rest of the world—all through this object that most of us can't live without.”

— JOSHUA A. BELL, PROFESSIONAL LECTURER IN ANTHROPOLOGY



The exhibit features a comic book-style mural that helps visitors understand the social effects of cellphones.

“Technological transformations have characterized each historical period—and, for us, the cellphone is the fundamental technological intervention of our time.”

—ALEXANDER DENT, PROFESSOR OF ANTHROPOLOGY

As a research assistant on Bell’s exhibit team, **Sarah Richardson**, PhD ’23, said she gained hands-on experience with behind-the-scenes museum work—from licensing artwork and obtaining display items to researching cellphone components. “I was welcomed onto a highly skilled team where my input has been valued, and the work has been consistently interesting and rewarding,” said Richardson, now the owner of an editing and research service that contracts with the Smithsonian.

“This has been a synergistic opportunity—in terms of our research partnerships and in terms of giving students a chance to really engage in natural history,” Bell said.

Changemakers and Witnesses

For the researchers, examining the cellphone’s prominence in society meant acknowledging its role as an indispensable tool for millions—while nodding to trade-offs like privacy invasions, worries over its toll on physical and emotional health and concerns about its ecological impact. “On the one hand, [cellphones] are deeply personal and interactive devices,” Kuiper said. “But they are also deeply global.”

While the Smithsonian exhibition is designed as “a non-judgmental space for critical conversations that also inform people,” Bell emphasized it also doesn’t shy away from controversial topics. Its centerpiece display addresses conflict-mineral mining and features specimens from around the world to represent the 65 elements that comprise standard cellphones.

Likewise, a large-scale comic book-style mural examines the social effects of cellphones. It tells the story of four fictional characters in Washington, D.C., and their experiences with cellphones—portraying the freedom of social media expression along with the anguish of doom scrolling.

Sections on the “cellphone as witness” highlight the technology’s role in documenting human rights abuses and spearheading movements like the Arab Spring, Black Lives Matter and the Ukrainian resistance—while also being used to spread misinformation and circulate images of violence.

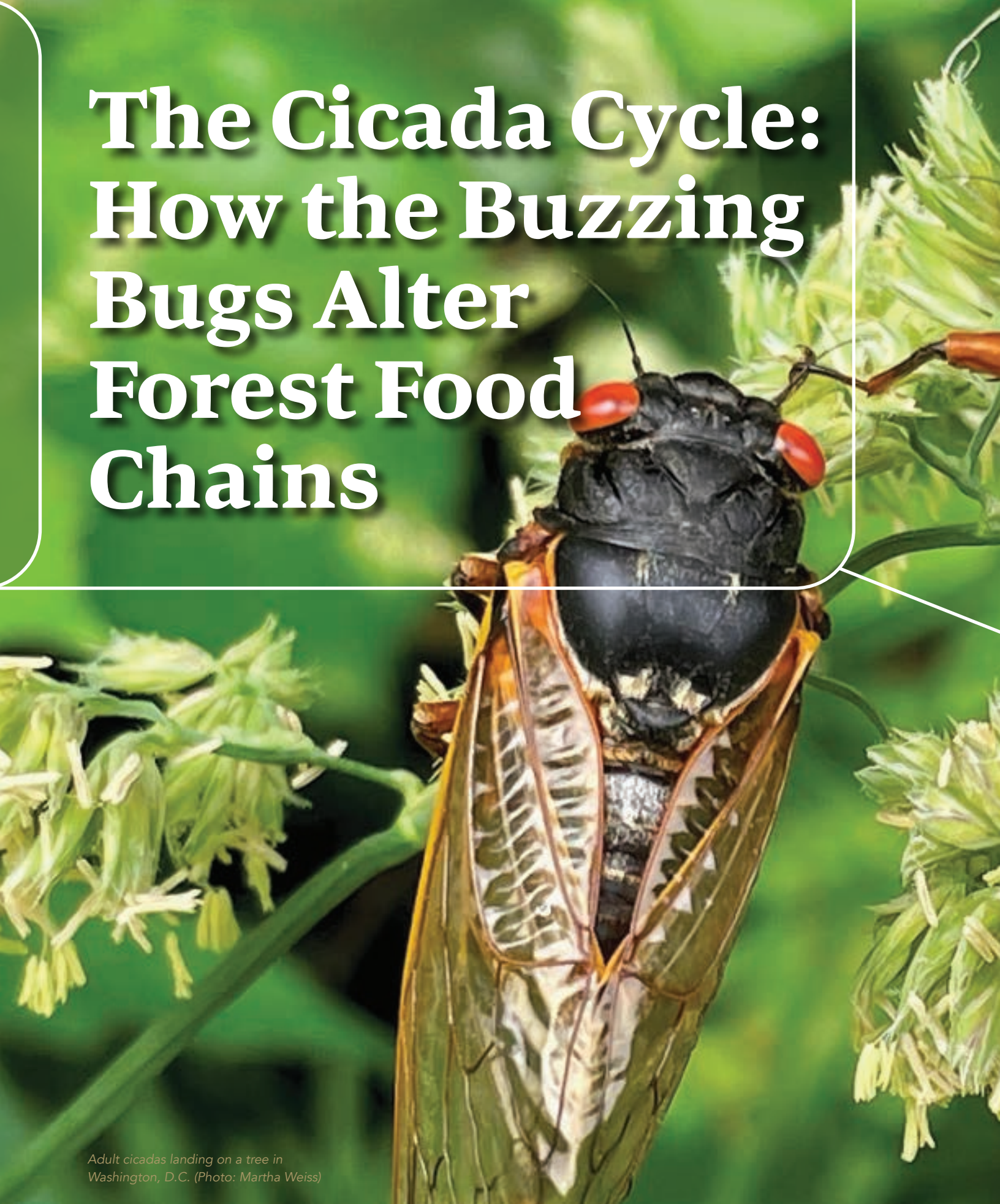
Among the 750 objects on display is a 1983 Motorola DynaTAC 8000x, the first handheld mobile cellular phone, which weighed nearly two pounds and took 10 hours to charge. In an interactive lab space, visitors can reconstruct an “exploded cellphone,” an activity that builds on collaborative GW-Smithsonian research on cellphone repair in D.C.

One of Bell’s favorite exhibits features 33 personal profiles of people from around the world who use cellphone technology to address issues such as health disparities and environmental and social justice. They include artisanal miners in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a young woman who campaigned for a hijab emoji and Native American students utilizing speech apps to revitalize their traditional language. “With these personal profiles, we wanted to create a space in the museum where people can see themselves and maybe even be inspired,” Bell said.

The exhibition is designed to host field trips and after-school programs. Meanwhile, Dent predicted it will springboard future cellphone-related research—including the group’s own studies on the links between cellphones and social inequality.

Bell hopes visitors will walk away from the exhibition with a greater understanding of how technology impacts their lives, cultures and communities. “One the goals of the show is to help people realize that technology is an important dynamic of what it means to be human in the 21st century,” he said. “There’s a generation that has never known a world without touchscreens. This is a chance to empower them to fully explore their potential.”

The Cicada Cycle: How the Buzzing Bugs Alter Forest Food Chains



Adult cicadas landing on a tree in Washington, D.C. (Photo: Martha Weiss)



Research by GW biologists reveals that even after cicada emergences subside, the insect invasion continues to eat away at ecosystems.

THE PERIODIC EMERGENCE OF A BILLION-STRONG ARMY OF CICADAS HAS BEEN a source of fascination since ancient times. Every 13 or 17 years—and sometimes in-between, as was the case this spring in several Southern and Midwestern states—the bulging-eyed insects emerge from the ground, blanketing forests and tree-lined streets. Harmless to people and pets, the bug barrage is mostly an annoyance as they dive bomb into car windshields and loudly buzz through backyard barbecues.

But while the insect invasion lasts just five to seven weeks, it leaves behind a legacy of environmental mayhem—eating away at forest ecosystems and disrupting the food chain among birds, caterpillars and trees.



A “buffet” of cicadas during the 2021 emergence shifted the diets of birds such as this grackle. (Photo: Dan Gruner)

“Our primary question was: If birds are changing their diets to feed on this abundant food item, what effects might that diet shift have for the forest community?”

— JOHN LILL, PROFESSOR OF BIOLOGY



The researchers glued fake caterpillars to tree branches and examined the beak marks left by birds at one of their field sites, the Bethesda-Chevy Chase Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America in Poolesville, Md. (Photo courtesy John Lill)

A study led by GW biologists and published last fall in the journal *Science*, revealed that the 2021 Brood X cicada emergence—one of the largest ever—served as an “all you can eat buffet” of cicadas that shifted the feeding patterns of birds, according to **Zoe Getman-Pickering**, first author of the study and a former GW postdoctoral researcher.

The sudden cicada feeding frenzy spurred a ripple effect throughout the forest food webs. More than 80 species of birds stopped snacking on caterpillars, their typical prey. Left to grow free from their main predator, the exploding caterpillar population in turn caused increased leaf damage on their host oak trees.

“Our primary question was: If birds are changing their diets to feed on this abundant food item, what effects might that diet shift have for the forest community?” said Professor of Biology **John Lill**, a co-author of the study.

Indeed, the team’s findings spotlight the interconnectedness of plants, animals and organisms in a shared environment—and how a change in the behavior of just one member sends shockwaves through the entire ecosystem. Combined with human intrusion—through factors like climate change, over-development and the introduction of invasive species—the rewired forest food chain may have larger implications for ecological issues from bird conservation to forestry and agricultural threats.

“Even events that seem very small can have big and surprising impacts on organisms that are much more connected than we might have imagined,” Getman-Pickering said.

Fake Caterpillars, Real Results

The team, which also included researchers from Georgetown University and the University of Maryland, spent four years collecting data at two Maryland conservation study sites, comparing conditions before, during and after the cicada emergence. They observed bird feeding patterns and recruited the help of the broader birding community to crowdsource observational data.



As a research assistant, Sarah Shamash, BS '23, checked tree branches for signs of leaf damage at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center in Edgewater, Md. (Photo courtesy Sarah Shamash)

The researchers counted the number of caterpillars on oak trees during the emergence and measured the subsequent damage they caused to leaves. They also planted decoy clay caterpillars throughout the forests—gluing about four fake caterpillars on the branches of each tree—to record whether the birds attempted to attack the caterpillar prey.

For then-CCAS research assistant **Sarah Shamash**, BS '23, the summer fieldwork meant watching foraging birds through binoculars and “turning over every leaf to look for caterpillars,” she said—all while braving 100 degree temperatures, swatting ticks and mosquitoes and “deriving immense joy and satisfaction” from the hands-on research.

A Wilbur V. Harlan and Luther Rice Undergraduate Research Fellow, Shamash said her time on the project and the mentorship of Lill and the other researchers changed her entire career trajectory. “I walked into the field on that first day as a committed pre-med student excited to try something new,” she said. “I never could have imagined that I would leave as an ecologist.” She even celebrated the project’s conclusion by getting a cicada tattoo. Now Shamash works as a researcher for the Illinois Natural History Survey, studying conservation and

management of Lake Michigan’s fisheries. “I jumped from cicadas and caterpillars to salmon and shiners,” she laughed.

Lill said their cicada research not only illuminates the emergence’s effect on food chains. It also offers clues to other ecological threats—like the decades-long pattern of bird decline.

“One way to interpret the results is that by demonstrating what happens when birds’ activity...is disrupted, we might get a glimpse of what a world with fewer birds looks like—with increased damage to both forestry and important agricultural crops,” he said. “It’s yet another reason why we need to concentrate efforts at conserving birds. Not only will we be preserving birds for people that like to hear them and watch them. We will also be preserving the important, essential ecosystem service that they provide.”

Researchers said the threat is more pressing than ever, particularly with the historic convergence of two broods—Brood XIII and Brood XIX—that emerged at the same time in spring and summer of this year. This type of convergence last occurred in 1803, more than two centuries ago. “In terms of documenting the complex species impacts that the cicada emergence has on this ecosystem,” Getman-Pickering said, “we really are just at the tip of the iceberg.”

Data Science Students Map a Mission for Ukraine

Ukrainians faced harsh winter temperatures in war-torn homes. But Columbian College students used their data science skills to map out a rescue plan.



Data science students working on the DSSD Ukraine map include (clockwise from left) Abhishek Chiffon, Anjali Mudgal, Cricket Baldwin, Vivian Wang and Shikha Kumari.

ON **CORA MARTIN'S** COMPUTER SCREEN, A geospatial map of Ukraine looked like a jigsaw of blocks and angles.

But for the data science graduate student, each shape had a meaning. Each polygon represented a bombed-out building in Kiev or Kherson and each cluster of points was a barrage of artillery fire.

It was Martin's job to translate those shapes into action, along with her team of fellow data science graduate and undergraduate students in the GW Data Science for Sustainable Development Hub, a chapter of the nonprofit Data Science for Sustainable Development (DSSD).

Over the past two years, the 23-member student-run group lent its expertise—from GIS and software engineering to making sense of massive datasets—to sustainable development organizations with technical capacity gaps. They worked with a

nonprofit addressing structural damage in Ukrainian cities and created a model that will help assess window damage and pinpoint homes that need repairs.

"You can look at it as simply dots on a map, but our team knew how serious each of these shapes and lines really are," Martin said.

Since Martin founded the GW chapter three years ago, DSSD has aided nonprofits, government agencies and other interest groups, working on projects in regions from Haiti to Japan. They've worked with a foundation that provides pro-bono solar installation across Wisconsin and an international nonprofit that engages in conflict resolution around the world.

"I've always been driven to create meaningful impacts, and the group's shared vision resonated with me," said **Anjali Mudgal**, a data science graduate student and head of software engineering for the Ukraine project. "The team's dedication to utilizing their skill sets for a greater good was inspiring."

DSSD also partnered with Sustainable GW to study the impact of the Yellowknife wildfire in Canada. The students’ “research was extremely valuable,” said Professor of Sustainability and International Affairs **Robert W. Orttung**. “We are definitely grateful for their support and look forward to further collaboration to better understand the data that we collect.”

In addition to showing data science students “the impactful work they can do by volunteering their time, their energy and their brains,” Martin said, the group’s projects offer hands-on experience in a burgeoning career field.

Ryan Engstrom, professor of geography and the director of the Columbian College Data Science Program, noted the sharp demand for data science expertise across areas like analytics, consulting, stock market forecasting and capturing GIS locations for disaster relief. The program increasingly attracts students across disciplines like political science, economics, geography and public affairs, he said, while connecting them with internships and careers at employers including Amazon, Booz Allen Hamilton, the National Institutes of Health and the World Bank. Indeed, the DSSD students, Engstrom said, are already honing their professional skills by learning to handle complicated data outside the classroom.

“Real data is messy. It can be incomplete; it can be hard to make sense of. It’s not easy to work with,” he said. “If you can take these huge datasets and turn them into something that a layperson can understand—that’s the whole idea behind data science.”

Geomapping Ukraine

For the Ukraine project, the DSSD team worked with the international nonprofit Insulate Ukraine to address a rapidly worsening crisis. With an estimated 10 million windows destroyed since the start of the war, many Ukrainians faced soaring energy prices and endured sub-zero winter temperatures as families fit plywood and plastic to their window panes and slept in bathtubs to keep warm.

“This project exemplifies how data science can make a substantial difference. It perfectly embodies the kind of real-world application I envisioned when I chose this field.”

— ANJALI MUDGAL, DATA SCIENCE GRADUATE STUDENT

Insulate Ukraine developed an affordable, shatter-proof polyethylene window that protects against the cold and trained Ukrainians on the ground to install them. Meanwhile, DSSD’s role was “to find a way to figure out how many windows—throughout the entire country—are broken,” Martin said.

The first step, Martin said, was for the DSSD team to “divide and conquer” with each of six students taking on a different project task—such as GIS, software engineering and data science research.

Working both remotely and at on-campus get togethers, they created three different maps: a geoboundary outline of Ukrainian districts; a spatial dataset of individual buildings; and estimates of war-related events based on an *Economist* database. The team then layered the maps on top of each other—forming a projection of buildings within 50 meters of each attack.

“It’s much harder than it sounds,” explained **Abhishek Chiffon**, a data science graduate student. Although time was of the essence, Chiffon said the team had to resist the urge to move too quickly. He often reminded himself to slow down and “remember this is real data...affecting real people.”

The team has mapped more than 43,000 buildings. “The work DSSD has done will help us to unlock the type of funding we need to actually solve this problem across the country,” said Insulate Ukraine founder Harry Blakiston Houston. “Without their work, it becomes almost impossible to estimate how big this problem is and where the problem is at its worst. With their work, those questions become much more clear.”

Indeed, the students said the project opened their eyes to the impact they can have as data scientists. “This project exemplifies how data science can make a substantial difference,” Mudgal said. “It perfectly embodies the kind of real-world application I envisioned when I chose this field.”



Before and After: Left, shattered windows in a Ukrainian home in Izyum, a city in the Kharkiv Oblast. Right, the same home with new insulating windows. (Photos courtesy Insulate Ukraine)



Ready to Launch: A Student's NASA Mission

Physics PhD student Nick Kirschner is part of a team at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center building the next generation of astrophysics instruments.



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PhD student Nick Kirschner's research journey took him from NASA labs to the New Mexico desert—part of an agreement that is propelling GW astrophysics to new heights.

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Kirschner with his faculty mentor Sylvain Guiriec, director of the Space Act Agreement. Kirschner used the Goddard thermal vacuum chamber to simulate real-world flight conditions.



NICK KIRSCHNER WOKE UP IN THE NEW MEXICO desert shortly before midnight and wondered if today was finally the day.

Was it launch day?

It was summer 2023. Kirschner, a fifth-year physics PhD student and a research astrophysicist at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, was part of a team of NASA scientists that had spent more than a month camped under the wide sky and blazing Southwestern sun. They were waiting for the winds to shift and the weather to clear—and a thumbs-up signal that their mission was a go.

For three years, Kirschner had been preparing to send a football field-size balloon carrying high-tech instruments into the atmosphere.

If the plans worked out—if gusts didn't blow the balloon toward a nearby small town, if thunderstorms or fog didn't obscure the sky—the mission could be an important early step in developing technologies to map gamma-ray bursts and potentially explore cosmic objects like supernova remnants and massive black holes.

But if the launch was scrubbed—like seven others since Kirschner arrived in the desert—the team would have to wait days or weeks to try again.

"We can have all this technology, we can do all this work," Kirschner said. "But we're basically at the mercy of the weather."

The project is called ComPair, a prototype mission that may lay the groundwork for exploring gamma rays in an uncharted range. It involves dozens of NASA scientists and researchers from labs and universities across the country, including GW.

And it's also the next phase in a deepening relationship between NASA and the GW Astrophysics Group. In 2021, GW and NASA formalized a milestone partnership with the Space Act Agreement, a pact that promotes university faculty and student research at Goddard. It opened the door to new exchanges of expertise on high-level astrophysics missions like ComPair.

"The Space Act agreement is a commitment between NASA and GW to pursue the same goal, which is research and

education," said CCAS Associate Professor of Astrophysics **Sylvain Guiriec**, an astrophysicist at Goddard and the director of the Space Act Agreement. "At Goddard, [our students] are developing missions and technology, building and launching instruments, and analyzing and interpreting data. They have access to scientists from everywhere in the world."

"The Sweet Spot"

Kirschner's journey from the NASA lab to the New Mexico launch site began in a physics classroom. Mentors like Guiriec piqued his research curiosity—particularly in high-energy astrophysics and gamma-ray burst science. Rather than dreaming of being an astronaut, the Philadelphia native realized he preferred building telescopes and technologies. "I enjoy instrumentation more than analysis," Kirschner said. "There are days I spend in the lab just screwing things in, connecting electronics, running tests—building things."

At Goddard, Kirschner joined a roster of GW students and alumni leading cutting-edge projects through the Space Act Agreement. PhD student **Roman Kosarzycki**, MS '22, for example, is part of a NASA partnership with the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency to develop an X-ray space telescope. And **Alyson Joens**, PhD '23, is the calibration lead for BurstCube, a shoebox-sized satellite that launched from NASA's Kennedy Space Center to the International Space Station.

"The GW partnership with NASA is a huge benefit for us," said Carolyn Kierans, a Goddard astrophysicist and principal investigator for ComPair. "It allows us access to amazing students. And it's a great training ground for the next generation of scientists."

The ComPair project aims, among other goals, to bridge a data gap in gamma-ray astrophysics. Gamma-ray bursts result from some of the universe's most explosive events, including the birth of black holes and collisions between neutron stars. While they can't penetrate the Earth's atmosphere, orbiting instruments like NASA's Fermi Gamma-Ray Space Telescope

“At Goddard, [our students] are developing missions and technology, building and launching instruments and analyzing and interpreting data. They have access to scientists from everywhere in the world.”

— SYLVAIN GUIRIEC, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ASTROPHYSICS

can detect gamma rays at low and high energy ranges.

But that leaves a middle range—what Kirschner calls “the sweet spot”—largely unexplored by current technology.

“There’s interesting physics in that gap,” Kirschner explained. “If we don’t have sensitive enough instruments, we can’t get the full picture of what’s happening out there.”

At Goddard, Kirschner built a tracker as part of a larger ComPair instrument to cover that missing middle range. He split his time between his office computer and his lab equipment, calibrating data and fitting 10 layers of silicon detectors into a two-foot-tall box. In a large thermal vacuum chamber, he tested the tracker under simulated real-world flight conditions and prepared for the launch.

The stakes were high, Kierans explained. If successful, ComPair could lay the foundation for the future of gamma-ray research. “We’re trying to prove to ourselves, to the [astrophysics] community and to NASA that this new technology can work on a much larger scale,” she said.

Launch Day

In New Mexico, the ComPair researchers set up camp outside the small town of Fort Sumner, with a population under 1,000 and a history as the spot where Billy the Kid was shot and killed. The team unpacked, reassembled and recalibrated their instruments—and waited.

Each day, they met with meteorologists to map out potential launch windows. If conditions looked promising, they’d start their preparations around midnight.

An ultra-thin helium balloon—Kirschner described it as a “giant plastic shopping bag”—would carry a payload of scientific instruments on a gondola. Throughout the night, NASA’s Columbia Scientific Balloon team floated small test balloons into the sky to monitor the unpredictable winds. At dawn, after nearly 40 days at the desert site, the mission finally launched.

For two hours, the team watched the balloon rise to 133,000 feet—four times the cruising altitude of a commercial airliner. It floated for three hours as Kirschner’s tracker collected data, before internal explosives in the balloon were detonated and the gondola parachuted to the ground.

While it may take more than a year to analyze the ComPair results, the early signs have been promising. “The ComPair flight was a huge success,” Kierans said. “All of the instruments were operating successfully, and the data that we got looks absolutely beautiful.” Plans for a second ComPair mission are already underway.

Meanwhile, GW is seeing the benefits of the NASA partnership, Guiriec said, as the pact attracts students to the department. “Being highly involved in the development of future instruments is a strategic key for our students as well as for the long-term sustainability of the GW Astrophysics Group’s activities,” he said.

For Kirschner, ComPair has been an invaluable opportunity to hone his skills on a real-world mission while working side-by-side with top astrophysicists—through long hours in the lab and long weeks in the field.

“The coolest part was seeing how all the necessary steps developed from day one to the very last day,” he said, “from putting instruments together to seeing it literally get off the ground.”



In the New Mexico desert, the NASA team prepared the balloon—a “giant plastic shopping bag”—for launch. (Photo: Carolyn Kierans)



impact

Kerry Washington Inspires Through Service, Support

With a master class and a \$1 million gift establishing a CCAS scholarship fund, award-winning actor Kerry Washington, BA '98, has wowed the GW community.

EMMY-WINNING ACTOR, DIRECTOR, PRODUCER, activist and Monumental Alumna **Kerry Washington**, BA '98, HON '13, inspired the GW community with a master class and a \$1 million gift to endow a Columbian College scholarship fund during a whirlwind campus visit last fall.

The star of TV's *Scandal* and *Little Fires Everywhere* and blockbuster films including *Django Unchained*, Washington provided a host of only-at-GW moments for the ages—speaking at an invite-only event for students from the Corcoran School of the Arts and Design's Department of Theatre and Dance; entrancing a sold-out Lisner Auditorium with a conversation

with her *Scandal* co-star Tony Goldwyn; and making a surprise announcement with GW President **Ellen M. Granberg**: a \$1 million donation to establish the Earl and Valerie Washington Endowed Scholarship.

Named in honor of her parents, it will provide need-based support for undergraduate students in the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences (CCAS) and, as an endowed fund, will endure in perpetuity, offering scholarships to many future generations of CCAS students.

“Kerry is a remarkable example of the determination and success so many GW alumni achieve in their chosen fields. We



*Corcoran Director
Lauren Onkey (left)
and alumna Kerry
Washington, BA '98,
HON '13.*

“The part of me that was intellectually curious, and the part of me that was geared towards social science, anthropology, psychology, sociology—at GW, I learned how to bridge those worlds.”

— KERRY WASHINGTON, BA '98, HON '13

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“I see in her career a reflection of the kind of person she was even while she was a student here, which is that she cared about the world, she was political, she was a wonderful artist and she was extremely humble and kind. I still see all that in her now.”

— LESLIE JACOBSEN
PROFESSOR EMERITA OF THEATRE



During her visit to Foggy Bottom, Washington reconnected with her mentor and former teacher Professor Emerita of Theatre Leslie Jacobsen.

are so proud of what she has accomplished in her life and career and the grace and generosity she continues to model,” said Granberg. “Thanks to her incredible generosity, a new generation of leaders and changemakers will have the opportunity to start their own amazing journey here at GW through the Earl and Valerie Washington Endowed Scholarship.”

Washington’s return to GW was part of a book tour in promotion of her memoir *Thicker than Water* (Little, Brown Spark, 2023), a candid, loving account of her relationship with her parents and the corrosive effect of long-held family secrets.

The memoir includes Washington’s journey to GW from the Bronx, N.Y., as an undergraduate, supported by a prestigious Presidential Performing Arts Scholarship. “With my scholarship, I was being paid not just to act but to learn how to act; I was given a toolbox to access and harness the magic,” Washington notes in her book.

Washington already was a working actor as a high school student, but it was at GW, she told the master class students, that she fell irrevocably in love with her craft.

“This is where I learned how to break down a scene and develop character and figure out beats and learn scene study and dramaturgy—all of that happened here,” she said. “I just fell in love with that. I fell in love with really wanting to create something beautiful and honest and real.”

Monumental Impact

In addition to a noted career in television, film and civic life, Washington has been an active supporter of her alma mater. Her time and service as a trustee and 2013 commencement speaker—and through the numerous moments she offered insight to GW students—led to her being recognized as a Monumental Alumna in 2021.

“Kerry is committed to her career and to making a meaningful difference through her philanthropy and her activism,” said **Donna Arbide**, GW’s vice president for development and alumni relations. “It is particularly moving that she has chosen to honor her parents by supporting future generations.”

An activist since her teens, Washington is heavily involved with social and political causes. She uses her platform to support grassroots efforts that promote democracy, women entrepreneurs and other causes.

Columbian College Dean **Paul Wahlbeck** expressed gratitude on behalf of the talented students her scholarship gift will attract. “Solving the complex problems facing humanity requires us to bring together people and ideas from diverse disciplines and cultures in innovative ways,” he said. “Our graduates are known for thoughtful deliberation, creative innovation and agile collaboration. Those are skills our world desperately needs, and that Kerry, in her many roles, embodies.”

Washington designed her own major at GW, with a focus not only on performance but also on the social sciences, particularly anthropology, sociology and psychology. “I felt like if my job is to embody the human experience, I’m going to do that better if I know about psychology and sociology and history,” she said during the master class. “It was really me studying people: how people become who they are and then how they express who they are and how they ritualize that and how they perform that. I love having a liberal arts education, and I think it really serves me all the time.”

College wasn’t always easy for Washington. A high-performing student who piled on extracurriculars, she struggled with extreme perfectionism that manifested in spells of depression, anxiety and an eating disorder. But she told students that thinking about her time at GW brought moments of joy too.

“I was an RA in Thurston, and I think about how much fun that was,” she said. “I think about the community of artists that I was a part of here, where everybody did everything. I have happy memories of being onstage but also taking apart the set at the end of a show—sitting onstage eating pizza after everything’s struck and the lights are down. The part of me that was intellectually curious, and the part of me that was geared towards social science, anthropology, psychology, sociology—at GW, I learned how to bridge those worlds.”

The talk resonated deeply with students, many of whom were aspiring actors, writers, directors and producers. **Nathan Desta**, a sophomore majoring in theatre and communications, “almost passed out” when he found out he’d have the opportunity to sit a few feet from Washington and ask her questions. “I’m a big fan of everything she does and everything she stands for,” Desta said. “I’m so glad I got to talk to her and just listen to her share.”

The master class audience even included some of her own former professors, whom Washington greeted with undisguised delight. And the feeling, clearly, was mutual.

“I see in her career a reflection of the kind of person she was even while she was a student here, which is that she cared about the world, she was political, she was a wonderful

artist and she was extremely humble and kind,” said **Leslie Jacobsen**, professor emerita of theatre, who directed Washington in multiple productions during her time in Foggy Bottom. “I still see all that in her now.”

Gabriella Tesi, a junior double majoring in theatre and communications, said she was “still shaking” after meeting Washington. Tesi herself recently auditioned for a role she didn’t get and noted, “I was having such a hard time accepting it. But when [Washington] said, ‘You know what, you’re either right for it or you just move on’—I definitely think that’s something that I’m going to carry with me.”

“Scandal”-ous Reunion

Later, an enthusiastic crowd packed Lisner Auditorium to watch the Politics & Prose event where Washington discussed *Thicker than Water* with Goldwyn, her *Scandal* co-star and close friend.

At the event, she discussed how *Thicker than Water* unpacks a secret Washington’s parents did not share with her until her mid-30s—that her father was not her biological parent and that she was conceived via artificial insemination, a much more taboo subject in the 1970s than it is today.

Though the family was extremely close—they often attended red carpet events together, and Goldwyn remembered Washington’s parents as a constant and beloved presence on set—Washington said their withholding caused a barrier she could not understand or explain until she learned the truth.

When she agreed in 2018 to be on a show that would explore her genetic roots, her parents reacted with unexpected dismay. That moment, she said, was the spur that forced them to tell her the truth.

“It’s like there was a painting in my house that had a missing puzzle piece, and my parents jammed in a piece from a different puzzle, just so we could be complete, and we all walked past that painting pretending that it was perfect,” Washington said. “And when my parents finally told me, it was like somebody took out that wrong puzzle piece for the first time, and I could breathe.”

Washington spoke with Onkey at an invite-only event for students from the Corcoran School of the Arts and Design.





Nya Lok, who captained the first-ever South Sudan women's basketball team to compete in international competition, often shared her life perspective with her GW women's basketball teammates.

'Who Much Is Given, Much Is Required': The Triumphant Story of Nya Lok

Born in an Ethiopian refugee camp to parents who fled the civil war in Sudan, the former Revolutionaries' basketball player is paving a path for others.

THERE WERE THE OBVIOUS SIGNS TO **NYA LOK**, BA '23, that she grew up differently than her peers in Melbourne, Australia, most notably that she spoke a different language at home than at school. And then there were the not-so-obvious ones, such as learning to cook at 7-years-old or having to walk her younger siblings to school.

As she navigated childhood in an adopted country, Lok wondered why she and her four brothers and three sisters were assigned tasks that other kids' parents seemed to be doing. But as she became more aware of how her family landed in southeast Australia, it soon became clear why she needed to learn these basic life skills at an early age.

"[My parents] did it out of the fact that if anything ever happened to them, we would know how to raise ourselves," Lok said. "They made sure we knew how to survive."

Lok's improbable journey took her to George Washington University—as an alumna, a graduate student and a vital member of the Revolutionaries women's basketball team.

But before she was born, her parents fled their native Sudan during the country's second civil war. Roughly two million people died during the nearly two-year conflict spanning from 1983 to 2005, and another four million people were displaced at least once.

Nya Lok drives the basketball against St. Louis at the Charles E. Smith Center. (Photo: Mitchell Layton)

Lok, who lived in an Ethiopian refugee camp until she was 5-years-old, hesitated to ask her parents about their escape, mostly because she could tell it was still traumatizing to them. But when she finally did, they told her about fleeing across rivers of floating dead bodies, not knowing if they were going to be killed—either by the people chasing them or the wild animals they encountered along the way.

With no landmarks within the eastern African landscape to guide them on their 1,000-mile journey to refuge, “they basically had to follow the sun,” Lok said.

Years later in Australia, sports became Lok’s own guiding light as she navigated Australian society while holding on to her native Nuer culture at home. Whether it was soccer, track or later basketball, sports provided a common understanding through a common goal.

Even as South Sudan became an independent nation in 2011, Lok eventually made her way to the United States to pursue basketball at the highest collegiate levels. She played two years at Midland Community College in Texas, where she caught the eye of GW coaching staff members who offered her a scholarship prior to the 2021-2022 season.

“We watched her, and we liked what we saw,” said GW head coach Caroline McCombs. “We saw a lot of growth between her freshman to sophomore years [at Midland].”

McCombs wasn’t the only one to notice Lok’s talents on the court. Prior to her first year at GW, Lok received an invitation to play for South Sudan’s first-ever women’s basketball team in an international competition—the June 2021 FIBA Women’s AfroBasket Zone 5 Qualifiers tournament in Rwanda.

Lok eagerly accepted and eventually became the team’s captain. The experience, which included a pre-tournament training camp with her teammates in Sacramento, was unforgettable, she said—both for the basketball and the opportunity to bond over a shared identity.

“It was amazing being able to play with all my sisters and understanding the way we grew up was the same and that our parents had similar stories,” Lok said. “I heard their stories on

their journeys through basketball, and then we played on that stage together. That was something that I’m very honored to have happened.”

The cultural significance of the team was not lost on Lok either, especially for women and girls from South Sudan, who, according to a 2017 report from the GW Global Women’s Institute (GWI), face staggering rates of violence compared to other nations. GWI researcher Maureen Murphy said those figures often reflect an imbalanced societal power structure. During her many trips to South Sudan for humanitarian work, Murphy noted that women and girls in the country were strong and resilient—but not necessarily recognized. Lok and her teammates representing the country on an international stage, Murphy said, can carry significant weight.

“Having strong women pushing against some of these cultural norms, playing sports and being elite athletes is truly amazing,” Murphy said.

Lok cherished the opportunity to be someone South Sudanese women and girls can look to for inspiration. During the 2021 tournament in Rwanda, her Instagram followers skyrocketed and her direct messages flooded with words of support—which only intensified her leadership desire and her drive to give hope to young girls in South Sudan.

“We wanted to pave the way in the sense of ‘If I can do it, another woman can do it too,’” Lok said. “I could have easily been any girl that is in South Sudan right now that didn’t make it on refugee status. I always say ‘Who much is given, much is required.’ If I’m given that, I need to provide that to every South Sudanese girl so they can have that opportunity as well.”

Lok took that leadership to heart at GW, where she played more than 80 career games while starting in over half of them, averaging over eight points per contest. She was recruited in part because of her growth between seasons at Midland, and McCombs said she saw even more progress since Lok donned the Buff and Blue.

“She has a lot of good perspective and insight she [shared] with our team,” McCombs said. “That’s something that was important not only for her growth but also our team’s growth...being that mentor on the basketball court has been very impactful.”

Lok graduated with a bachelor’s degree in sociology and entrepreneurship in 2023. Her parents traveled from Australia to see her Commencement on the National Mall. Currently pursuing a master’s degree, Lok aspires to create solutions to social problems and find sustainable ways to give back to people who need it.

Her main message is to keep persisting because, as she said, there’s another person in this world just waiting for their own sun to follow.

“It’s so important to understand that the more you can fight through your adversity, the more you are paving the path for somebody else to walk,” Lok said. “Someone is waiting for you to do it so they can find the courage to do what it is they need to do.”

“The more you can fight through your adversity, the more you are paving the path for somebody else to walk.”

— NYA LOK, BA ’23



Biology Students Thrive as Harlan Fellows



Program Coordinator Nico MacDougall (second from right) with last summer's Harlan scholars (from left) Cole Christensen, Valerie Chen, Zoe Ilgenfritz, Martina Tsimba, Maggie Connolly and Margarita Kyza-Karavioti at the Botanic Gardens.

A cohort of biology students spent their summer vacation in the lab and the field thanks to a CCAS program that supports undergraduate research opportunities.

MAGGIE CONNOLLY, BS '24, SPENT THE SUMMER OF 2023 on the Chesapeake Bay. But she wasn't sailing or fishing for crabs. The then-senior biology major hiked through fields of swampy marshland along Virginia's Eastern Shore, fighting off swarms of mosquitoes in oppressive heat and humidity.

It's not what most people would call a vacation. But Connolly was one of seven undergraduate biology and neuroscience majors who received a donor-funded Wilbur V. Harlan Undergraduate Research Fellowship. The merit-based scholarship enabled them to spend extra time on campus, conducting high-level independent research in faculty labs and field sites.

A research assistant with Associate Professor of Biology **Keryn Gedan**, whose work focuses on ecological threats to the bay, Connolly's Harlan project involved collecting groundwater samples to gauge the effect of rising salt content on plant species. Amid the mud and bugs of the Brownsville, Va., tidal marshes, she quickly learned that the field is a different world from the lab.

"The amount of mosquitos was unlike anything I had ever experienced," she said. "On my first field trip, I walked away with over 100 bites. They even bit through my clothes!"

Supported by the Wilbur V. Harlan Trust—a \$9 million bequest from the estate of the late Wilbur V. (Bill) Harlan, BS '35, a botany major who briefly served as a lab instructor at GW—the cohort of undergraduates were introduced to an intensive 14-week research experience, working closely with faculty mentors and graduate assistants on scientific projects of their own design.

In addition to 40 hours a week of field and lab research, they attended workshops and seminars on topics such as professional development and scientific techniques. They also visited scientists across the D.C. region, including at the National Arboretum and the Botanic Gardens. Later, the Harlan Fellows presented their research findings in a poster session before family, friends and faculty.



As Harlan Fellows, Margarita Kyza-Karavioti (left) examined millimeter-size fruit flies in Professor of Biology Ioannis Eleftherianos' lab and Martina Tsimba (right) manipulated butterfly eggs while working with Associate Professor of Biology Arnaud Martin.

“The Harlan Trust is truly playing a central role in training the next generation of young biologists.”

— DAMIEN O'HALLORAN
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF BIOLOGY

“These students have what it takes to be successful in a self-directed research experience and to continue a career in science,” said Associate Professor of Biology **Damien O'Halloran**. “The Harlan Trust is truly playing a central role in training the next generation of young biologists.”

A Gamut of Research

Each Harlan student brought different biology backgrounds and research experiences to the fellowship, noted Program Coordinator **Nico MacDougall**. Some were sophomores who had never set foot in a lab while others were veteran research assistants embarking on their senior thesis projects. “It’s a whole gamut of people. But what they have in common is their dedication and their interest in biology research,” MacDougall said. “Because they’re essentially signing up for a full-time job.”

After COVID curtailed an internship at the National Cancer Institute, undergraduate **Martina Tsimba** wanted to make up for lost lab time as she prepares for a career in pediatric oncology. She considered working in a hospital but was accepted into Associate Professor of Biology **Arnaud Martin**’s lab studying the genetics of butterfly wings. “In all honesty, I

am not an insect person,” she laughed. “But I figured that of all insects, butterflies were the lesser evil.”

While she was initially intimidated by the high-tech lab—“I was afraid of breaking something,” she said—Martin and his graduate student researchers trained her on sophisticated equipment like the gene-editing tool CRISPR. For her Harlan project, Tsimba manipulated genes in butterfly eggs to understand how wing pigmentation influences sex selection. “I felt like I was thrown right into the day-to-day tasks of a researcher,” Tsimba said.

During her time in Professor of Biology **Ioannis Eleftherianos**’ lab, **Margarita Kyza-Karavioti**, BA ’24, learned challenging techniques—like injecting chemicals into millimeter-size fruit flies, a crucial step in her Harlan project on investigating immunity against the Zika virus.

And Connolly’s treks in the Chesapeake Bay enabled her “to get out in the field to see what our ecological research in coastal ecosystems is really all about,” said Gedan, who praised the Harlan Fellowship for “piquing a new researcher’s natural curiosity.”

Throughout the program, expert-led seminars and lectures offered training on cutting-edge techniques that department scholars use in their own research, O’Halloran said, from CT scanning and computer programming to 3D modeling of bones and tissues.

The program activities also gave the students an opportunity to bond over shared interests. Along with their independent work, many said they most enjoyed comparing notes with their cohort. “My favorite part of being a Harlan Fellow was the community,” Tsimba said. “I loved our weekly seminars and our lunches. I feel like I got the chance to really know the other fellows.”

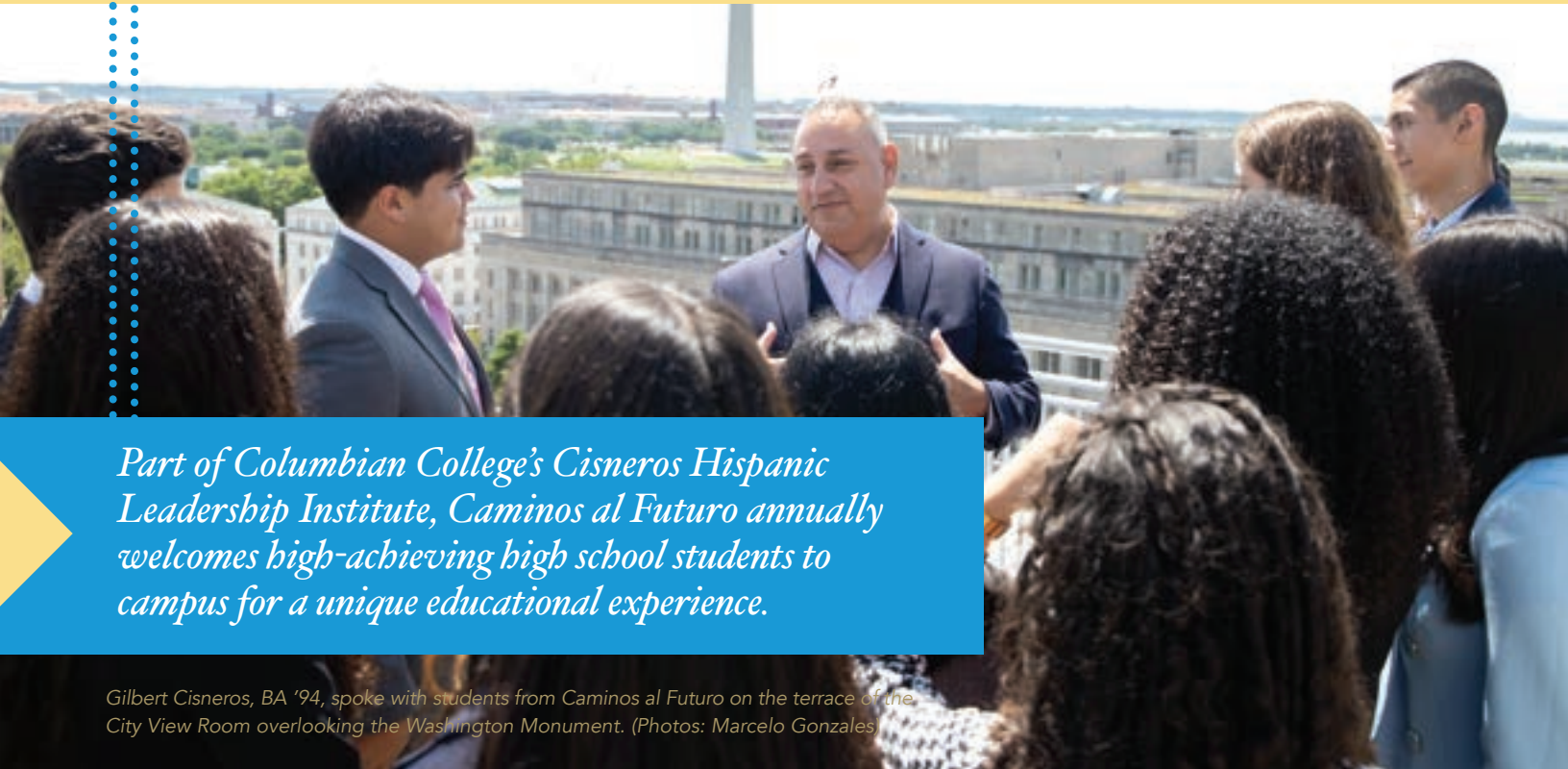
For some students, O’Halloran said, the Harlan program can be a springboard for future research distinctions like the Luther Rice Undergraduate Research Fellowship. Meanwhile, many of the fellows continued their summer projects into the fall semester. Even after the fellowship, Connolly was ready to venture back into the marsh—but with stronger bug spray.

“I learned a great deal about working as a field biologist, both independently and as part of a team,” she said. “The Harlan Fellowship provided me with opportunities and experiences that are hard to find anywhere else.”



Maggie Connolly’s Harlan project involved hiking into Chesapeake Bay marshlands along Virginia’s Eastern Shore.

Camino al Futuro: Inspiring Latino Students to Succeed



Part of Columbian College's Cisneros Hispanic Leadership Institute, Camino al Futuro annually welcomes high-achieving high school students to campus for a unique educational experience.

Gilbert Cisneros, BA '94, spoke with students from Camino al Futuro on the terrace of the City View Room overlooking the Washington Monument. (Photos: Marcelo Gonzales)

BEFORE ENROLLING IN BENJAMIN FRANKLIN HIGH School, a magnet institution in New Orleans, Carmen Colón had to pass an entrance exam. Her other choice was to attend a private school—and pay annual tuition as high as \$30,000.

For Colón, like many young Latinos in her community, those were not good choices. Colón had long been a high academic achiever. But many of her peers were unaware that they had to take the entrance exam—and many others were unprepared. Colón saw classmates fall behind in STEM studies and, too often, drop out of school altogether.

“It is important to me to change that,” Colón said. “Everyone should have equal access to higher education without worrying about finances or language barriers.”

Last summer, Colón was accepted into the Camino Al Futuro program, a pre-college and residential initiative sponsored by Columbian College's Cisneros Hispanic Leadership Institute, which was founded through the philanthropy of former congressman and Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness **Gilbert Cisneros**, BA '94, and his wife, Jacki

“Camino al Futuro stood out to me because it was made for Latinos by Latinos. It offered an insider view on Latinos in the U.S. as well as unique perspectives of other peers coming from a plethora of different backgrounds.”

— CARMEN COLÓN, CAMINOS AL FUTURO SCHOLAR

Cisneros. With 12 other Latino high school students—all of whom were rising seniors committed to service and leadership within their communities—Colón spent three weeks immersed in GW's campus environment while developing as her final project a blueprint to create workshops in Spanish and English that offer STEM resources to Latino students.

“Camino al Futuro stood out to me because it was made for Latinos by Latinos,” Colón said. “It offered an insider view on



Last summer's Caminos al Futuro students with Gilbert Cisneros. Back row, from left: Brandon Santiago-Ramos, Paulo Rivera, Christopher Melendez, Cisneros, Carmen Colón, Ethan Arreguin and Gregory Cisneros. Front row, from left: Jessica Aldana, Dania Arteaga, Karina Sanchez, Maliarys Pérez-Navarro, Alexia Zelada, Rachel Fils-Aime and Valery Montenegro-Hernandez.

Latinos in the U.S. as well as unique perspectives of other peers coming from a plethora of different backgrounds.”

Developing Leadership and Community

The Caminos program is designed to help prepare outstanding young Latino students to enroll—and thrive—in top colleges, said **Elizabeth Vaquera**, executive director of the Cisneros Institute and CCAS associate professor of sociology and public policy and public administration. Caminos scholars examine the social, economic and political transformations affecting the Hispanic/Latino community. Through lectures by university professors and expert leaders in their fields, scholars not only learn about pressing contemporary issues but also create projects to bring change in their own communities.

During their time at GW, they met with Rep. Linda Sánchez (D-Calif.) at her office on Capitol Hill; visited the White House, Pentagon and Supreme Court; and took a private tour of the National Museum of African American History and Culture. They also participated in a three-credit college-level course that focused on Latinos in the United States and a writing class geared toward the college applications process held by Cisneros Institute leadership.

Vaquera said that everyone from faculty to members of Congress were impressed by the students' enthusiasm and commitment. “Keep up the energy you brought here to the program,” Vaquera told the students. “There will always be obstacles, but you have shown us that you are all resilient, capable young people who are already leaders, and will continue to grow into your leadership.”

Among the other final projects developed and presented by the Caminos students was one by Rachel Fils-Aime, who designed a college fair and a series of workshops to introduce students in her rural Minnesota county to wider educational options. “There is a mentality [for students] to stay within my area and not have bigger dreams,” she said. “That is something that I felt has held me back, and I don't want other students to feel the same frustration.”

Brandon Santiago-Ramos drew on his Olathe, Kansas, community's love of soccer to plan a county-wide tournament supported by local Latino-owned businesses and featuring educators and nonprofits with information on college admissions. “I found that many Latino families and students are unaware of the resources and opportunities available to them in Olathe,” he said. “And soccer has been a passion of mine since I was a child, so that was a no brainer.”

At the Caminos closing ceremony, Gilbert Cisneros encouraged students to seek out broad educational opportunities and push back against obstacles to success. “We need to do more to help these kids find their way to college,” said Cisneros, who came to GW to major in political science on an ROTC scholarship and was the first in his family to attend college. “I want them to have the same experience that I had,” and he urged the Caminos students to “ask yourself: ‘What else is out there for me? How can I challenge myself to be my very best?’”

Columbian College Dean **Paul Wahlbeck** commended the students' accomplishments and encouraged them to continue to inspire their communities.

“It is my hope that you, our next generation of leaders, take what you have learned through this program back to your schools and communities,” he said. “Tell your peers that there is a home for them at universities befitting of their academic achievements and capabilities. Tell them a university is a place for people who dream of changing the world—and who, like you, have the leadership skills to make it happen.”



Carmen Colón (right), a high school student from New Orleans, presented her final project to Cisneros and Chante Clarkson, executive director of academic success programs at the Office for Student Success.

Donor Impact In Brief

BEALES GIFT IS LARGEST EVER FOR A GW GIVING DAY CAMPAIGN



From left: Columbian College Dean Paul Wahlbeck, Regulatory Studies Center (RSC) Director Roger Nober, GW President Ellen M. Granberg, GW Professor Emeritus Howard Beales, Char Beales, BA '73, and RSC Founder Susan Dudley

GW GIVING DAY, WHICH OCCURS annually in the spring, saw an outpouring of support from nearly 3,500 alumni, students, faculty, staff, families and friends hailing from all 50 states and more than a dozen countries. Professor Emeritus **Howard Beales** and his wife, alumna **Char Beales**, BA '73, made history with a generous gift of \$600,000—the largest ever for a GW Giving Day campaign. The Beales Regulatory Studies Center Research Fund will support senior fellows in TSPPPA's Regulatory Studies Center and continue founder **Susan Dudley**'s legacy of conducting applied research on regulation impacts and advance its mission to improve regulatory policy through research, education and outreach.

In addition to the Beales gift, a record number of matching grants and challenges were offered, magnifying the impact of each donor's contribution and making 2024's Giving Day the most successful ever. Several schools and units exceeded their fundraising objectives, with Columbian College leading the charge through gifts from more than 300 donors.

President Granberg (center) with current Wolcott Foundation fellows and trustees.



WITH \$4 MILLION GIFT, WOLCOTT FOUNDATION EXPANDS ITS LEGACY

SINCE 1953, MORE THAN 500 GW graduate students pursuing a career in public service have benefited from the Wolcott Foundation's annual funding of its fellowship program. Now, the foundation is expanding and strengthening its philanthropic legacy with a new \$4 million endowed gift.

The fellowships provide critical support for students seeking to participate in impactful research and service and take advantage of the mentoring and career development opportunities that prepare them to serve the public interest and influence public policy, noted GW President **Ellen M. Granberg**. "We are immensely grateful," she said.

For former fellow **Alivia P. Roberts**, MPA '20, a graduate of Columbian College's Trachtenberg School of Public Policy & Public Administration (TSPPPA) and current director of federal government affairs at the Motion Picture Association, the fellowship was transformative.

"The Wolcott Foundation should be proud of their work as it changes the trajectory of public servants," said Roberts. "Being a Wolcott Fellow gave me an advantage when entering the workforce and in my life. I am so grateful for the foundation's commitment in helping students like me become better versions of themselves, build relationships with like-minded scholars, and serve their communities."

CORCORAN VISITING PROFESSOR SHARES HER TALENTS

THANKS TO A GRANT administered by the Trustees of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, artist and activist **Caroline Woolard** shared her talents with students as this past year's William Wilson Corcoran Visiting Professor of Community Engagement. She taught the course the Art Worlds We Want, which reflected her interest in collaborating on projects designed to bring a better, more just society into being. Students explored the ways that creative projects might be allowed

to move through the world "with principles of cooperation and care," said Woolard.

"Part of my work is around creating environments that allow people to imagine the worlds that they want," Woolard said. "I believe that very unconventional furniture and physically moving your body in ways that you might not be accustomed to...helps people get in a state that allows them to dream and imagine new ways of being."

Caroline Woolard sits in her art piece, *Queer Rocker*.





New Endowment Memorializes Professor's Impact

WHEN PROFESSORS **ERIC CLINE** AND **DIANE Harris Cline** joined the GW faculty in 2000, the pair of historians had an important decision to make. Or, rather, Eric had a decision to make.

"She told me that she had already claimed the DrCline@gwu.edu email address so I had to pick something else," he recalled. Ironically, in the years to come, students and colleagues started to refer to his wife by an affectionate new title: Lady Cline.

Diane Harris Cline passed away in 2023 following a battle with cancer. The much-loved Lady Cline was an associate professor in the Department of History and an instructor in the Department of Classical and Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations (CNELC). Over a span of 14 years, she led students on a trip to Greece, coordinated the Classical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies Program and gained a reputation for electrifying lectures. "People always said that I teach the students the facts and she breathes life into them," said her husband, a CNELC professor and director of the GW Capitol Archaeological Institute.

Proficient in eight languages, she was an accomplished scholar and author who received prestigious awards throughout her career, including three GW teaching prizes, two Fulbrights and the National Archives Citizen Archivist Award. "Some professors are well known for their scholarship, and some are well-known for their teaching. But Diane Harris Cline was known for both," said **Christopher Rollston**, CNELC department chair.

She was an established historian and archaeologist when she elected to take a five-year detour into national security work, inspired to enter public service following the 9/11 terror attacks. Upon returning to GW in 2008, she brought a new lens to academia and became a trailblazer in social network analysis. She was among the first scholars to publish and teach

social network analysis as a way to illustrate the social lives of key historical figures, such as Socrates and Alexander the Great.

Colleagues remembered her, above all else, as an enthusiastic educator. Professor of History **Denver Brunsman** described her as "the pedagogical conscience" of GW's history faculty. According to CNELC Professor **Elise Friedland**, Diane Harris Cline "poured her creativity, intensity and energy into her students, sought to ignite in them her passion for the study of the ancient world and created countless research opportunities for them, especially in digital humanities."

Memorial Recognizes Humanities Research

The Clines often discussed their shared excitement over students embracing historical research opportunities, particularly those involving digital techniques. Eric Cline recalls his wife telling him about one particularly groundbreaking thesis that used social network analysis to map community ties between the accused and accusers of the Salem witch trials.

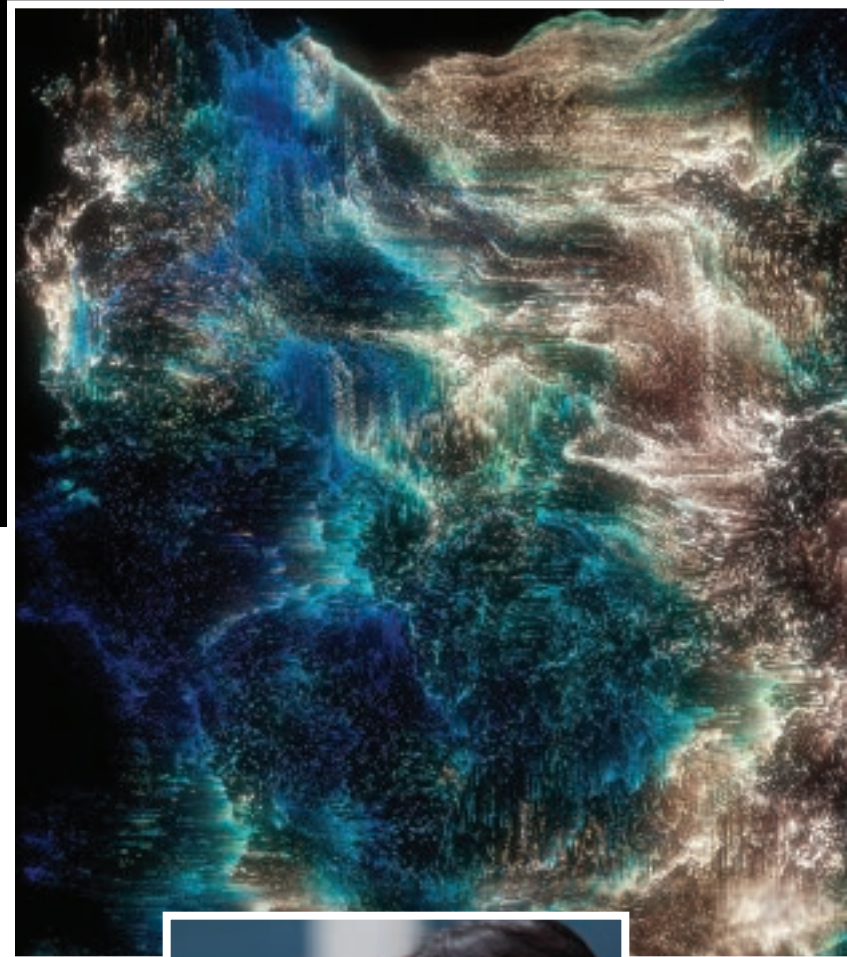
These conversations were fresh in Eric's mind when he considered how best to honor her legacy at GW. Through a generous gift to the university, Eric established the Diane Harris Cline Memorial Prize for Classics and History, which will be given to an exemplary student in CNELC or history who completes a research project related to antiquity and/or digital humanities. For GW Giving Day 2024, the award was among the most popular among CCAS funds donors supported, a testament to Diane Harris Cline's enduring popularity.

Eric Cline described his wife as someone who "gave unstintingly to others." He noted how fitting it was that the connective threads of her own social network will multiply in the years to come as this award touches the lives of future generations of GW students.

NEXT 2024 Celebrates Tableau of Student Artistry

COLUMBIAN COLLEGE'S CORCORAN SCHOOL of the Arts and Design once again opened the doors of its historic Flagg Building for the annual NEXT Festival, a showcase of art projects by graduating students from across the fine arts, design, theatre, dance, music, interior architecture, photojournalism, museum studies and art history disciplines.

More than 80 students displayed their talent through 47 exhibits, 22 live performances and numerous panels and research-based presentations that explored topics ranging from climate change and craft work to AI experimentation and queer identity.



Golem, a mixed media sculpture by Jack Pecau, BFA '24



*Kevin Darmadi, BA '24
(Photo: Maria Luz Bravo, MA '17)*



*Cyclic City, an immersive experience by JoJo Chen, MA '24
(Photo: Maria Luz Bravo, MA '17)*



Invisible Scroll 墨隐若现 by Xitong (Rocky) Yuan, BA '24



NEXT featured numerous displays of student artwork.



*333, dance performance
created by Alexia
Papatsa, BA '24*

Class of 2024 Share ‘Only at GW’ Memories

From internships and classroom experiences to forging lifelong friendships and attending one-of-a-kind events, recent Columbian College graduates recalled their fondest GW memories.



Cammie Hussey

*BA Political Science,
Minor in Theater*

“I found a home in GW’s student theater. Over the past few years, I have racked up countless amazing moments with this group, but the experience I cherish most was when I was able to put on my own show. Sure, I remember the Saturday night when every seat was filled, some people even sitting on the floor. But the most special performance was our Friday late-night show. Four people came. I’m not exaggerating, four. But this talented, fantastic group took it as an opportunity to play. I couldn’t feel my cheeks by the end because I was smiling so hard. I hope those four people were as entertained as I was. I had more fun at the performance than any other, and I will remember it years from now. GW’s student theater taught me many lessons, but more importantly, it introduced me to lifelong friends.”



Emily Linder

*BA Communication
and Speech Hearing and
Language Science, Minor in
Organizational Science*

“Being involved in the National Student Speech and Hearing Association allowed me to help organize community events around speech therapy and hearing health care while having the chance to interact with people I would not have had the chance to otherwise (like ASL interpreters). GW gave me professors who I felt cared about my development as a person and friends who I have made [my] chosen family.”

Aleena Fayaz

BA Political Communication

“As a student in the School of Media and Public Affairs, I’ve tried to take full advantage of the opportunities at my fingertips. From the classes I have taken to the professors who have instructed me to the events we hold on campus, SMPA is the heartbeat of D.C., and I have a front-row seat to the show. Lively campus organizations such as GW-TV and WRGW District Radio have given me the opportunity to flex my media muscles in a fun, recreational setting. As executive producer and anchor of GWeek, I confirmed my love for television production and applied class lessons to tangible packages and editing, ultimately leading to my internship at CNN where I would put those skills to the test in my first newsroom experience. Being an SMPA student means being a lifetime learner, one who listens and leads not just in the classroom but wherever they go. As I depart GW, I will continue to use my platforms to share the lessons I’ve learned at SMPA—ones of trust, truthfulness, creativity and authenticity.”



James Bishop IV

BA Sociology

“It’s bittersweet having walked off the Smith Center court for the final time, but I know our basketball program is on the rise, especially with the community we’ve created on and off campus. Everyone has shown me so much love during my career, and I’m forever thankful for all the support given to me and my teammates. Thank you to George’s Army, our fans, alumni and donors for making these four years incredibly special to me and my family. I can’t wait to come back and help support our university and our team moving forward!”



Margarita Kyza-Karavioti

BS Biological Sciences

“My most cherished memories at GW center on spending time with friends and individuals with whom I feel completely comfortable. Whether it’s walking around Georgetown and the waterfront or simply hanging out watching movies, much of my time is spent in the company of my roommates. One standout memory that holds a special place in my heart is our spontaneous tanning session at the Washington Monument back in 2023. Not only is this a classic GW experience, given our proximity to iconic landmarks, but it deepened our bond. Sharing a picnic while basking in the sun, filled with laughter and joy, brought us even closer together.”



Yanik Matysiak

MA Strategic and Media Communication

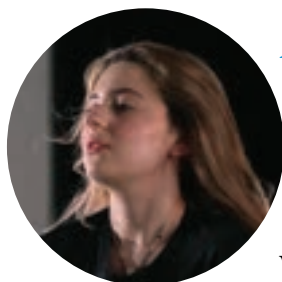
“As a student and graduate assistant, I experienced GW from a student and staff perspective. Working with the many professors at the School of Media and Public Affairs has always been a joy, but my favorite moment in class was when Professor **Del Wilber**, whom I assisted as a graduate assistant, brought in Axios publisher Nicholas Johnston. His lecture was inspiring, and learning about Axios and their concept of smart brevity was very interesting. This is one of the many only-at-GW moments throughout my time in the nation’s capital. Besides interacting with the professors, I always enjoyed getting to know my peers in my program who came from all over the world. Interacting with people from different countries and learning more about their cultures and languages is always fun. I was glad my master’s program was so diverse, and I was able to learn many new things outside the academic curriculum.”



Alexia Papatsa

BA Dance

“Dance has been a big part of my GW experience and so my favorite memories are usually with my dance peers. My first semester as a senior was my first time working with a cast of 10 dancers, which was challenging but also extremely fun since we are such a tight community. Midway through our process we figured that we needed to find a way to come together and focus on creating large-scale choreography. I picked up on a move in the piece where the dancers were supposed to breathe deeply as a cue to start improvising, and I asked them to take a collective deep breath every time I needed them to focus. It became our ritual before and after they performed and during some stressful times. To this day, it is still my safe space memory. When I dance or when I am feeling under pressure, I just take myself back in that studio with them, I breathe in and out and keep going.”



Maggie Connolly

BS Biology, Minor in Psychological and Brain Sciences

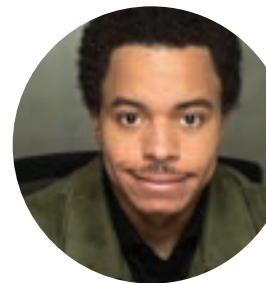
“Reflecting on my time at GW, one standout memory is the excitement of uncovering hidden spots throughout Washington, D.C. I was lucky enough to spend this past summer on campus while participating in a research fellowship, and the night of the Fourth of July is one that I will remember forever... . The top floor of the 1959 E Street dorm has a great view of the National Mall and D.C. skyline where you can see from the Capitol all the way to the Kennedy Center. Some friends and I brought a picnic up to the rooftop where we were joined by other summer residents cooking out and watching the show. This spot did not disappoint! It was by far the best place in the city to watch the fireworks, and turned out to be one of my favorite only-at-GW moments! The college experience at GW is unlike any other, and I am extremely grateful for the time I have been able to spend here.”



Cole Harriston

BA Theater, Minor in Anthropology

“My fondest memories at GW began with performing in a play for the first time at the university during the pandemic. With each subsequent play I took part in, I learned more about myself as an actor and how integral the whole cast and crew is for a production. In my four years, I was cast as characters as varied as a game show host, God and a Polish film producer... . This past year, with some help from the Theatre Department’s **Carl Gudenius** and **Ann Norton**, I interned as an assistant director at the Washington Stage Guild, an experience that expanded my appreciation for D.C.’s vibrant theater scene.”



Nicholas Anastácio

BS Data Science, BA Political Communication

“From getting the chance to intern at major news organizations like CNN and NBC News to shaking the speaker of the House’s hand during a random tour of the U.S. Capitol, there are just too many memories to choose from when looking back at my time at GW. But one from junior year stands out. I was interning at NBC News’ Political Unit, covering politics and gathering research ahead of the 2024 elections. After my shifts on Wednesdays, I would hop on the Metro to go to my night class at the School of Media and Public Affairs, getting the unique opportunity to hear from a guest speaker actively working in political campaigning in **Oren Shur**’s Political Campaign Communication class. Only at GW could you cover politics in the morning and hear from political professionals at night.”





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Congratulations Class of 2024!

